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PRESIDENT OBREGÓN

# *PRESIDENT OBREGÓN*

*A World Reformer :: By Dr. E. J. Dillon*

*Author of "The Peace Conference," "Mexico on the Verge"*

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WITH FRONTISPIECE

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:: PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C. ::

TO ADOLFO DE LA HUERTA  
WHO  
AS CITIZEN, SOLDIER AND STATE-CHIEF  
HAS LONG BEEN A HERALD AND FORERUNNER  
OF THAT  
LEAGUE OF PEOPLES  
WHICH ONE DAY WILL SUPERSEDE  
THE PRESENT  
LEAGUE OF VICTORIOUS GOVERNMENTS  
THIS LIFE-SKETCH  
OF HIS FRIEND AND COMRADE  
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

## PREFACE

GENERAL OBREGÓN is, to my thinking, the most attractive figure on the world-scene to-day. Falling into no class he cannot be labelled. He is a pioneer, and no one who takes the beaten track is that. As a private individual his career is a remarkable human document. As a soldier who headed a revolution against revolutions and waged war against war, he was the hero of many thrilling episodes. As a popular leader he gave proof of that rare, magical quality which wins the sympathies and arouses the enthusiasm of men. The soldiers in the field and the peasants on the road-side took fire like sun-browned grass at his approach, and accomplished feats deemed impossible before. As a Mexican statesman he stands out as the great reality of his country and his race: he has, at any rate for the time being, rescued the former from the danger that threatened its political existence and the latter from a most perilous precedent. A successful General, he is a convinced pacifist, who denies the right of any people to take up arms except to defend their country from foreign invasion or to rescue it from internal anarchy. And as a world-reformer, he is the only one who, having fallen in with the pressing needs of the new epoch, possesses the will, and to some extent the power, to satisfy them both within the confines of an independent State. Of all contemporary statesmen he alone stands for the aspirations of that growing section of the human race who feel and know that regeneration cannot proceed from laws, edicts or institutions but only from a wholly new moral and cultural orientation. He is now proceeding with an unprecedented experiment: the substitution of plain dealing for tortuous diplomacy, of justice for privilege and of morality for war. Having come into close contact with the seamy side of human nature at its worst, instead of turning cynical and sour, he has maintained his faith in humanity intact.

## Preface

Two vast politico-social experiments have been undertaken in our time. One by Lenin and Trotzky which dismally failed ; the other by a nucleus of capitalists and professional politicians in the United States who are striving to build up a world-empire after the model of that of ancient Rome, re-cast in a Yankee mould with a division of peoples and races into classes and grades, goats and sheep, all responsive to the power of gold.

But there is yet a third essay which challenges and deserves the closest attention of all who are interested in the welfare of mankind. It is going forward in the Mexican Republic whose President is grounding a scheme of governance on justice, veracity and the right of all freely to develop their capacities for the well-being of the community, and is endeavouring to awaken in the people a consciousness of human dignity and a corresponding sense of responsibility and of duty as the correlatives of liberty. The worth of nationality itself in this reformer's scale of values is in direct ratio to the sincerity with which it recognizes and strives after co-operation with all the members of the human family.

The object of the following pages is to examine Obregón's qualifications for this arduous task, to describe his progress, and to bespeak the moral sympathy of all men of good will for its ultimate success.

My sincere thanks are due to the Editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* for his kind permission to embody in this book some biographical extracts from articles of mine on Obregón's life which appeared in the columns of that admirable periodical.

The Alhambra,

Granada,

Spain.

15th October, 1922.

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# PRESIDENT OBREGÓN

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

TO the student of contemporary history who can view things and persons in correct perspective, Alvaro Obregón will appear as a world statesman of a wholly new type. He personifies that wide-spread, semi-conscious, spiritual movement to which the future of civilization—should civilization survive—admittedly belongs and which is concerned with the furtherance of the interests not only of a people or a nation but of the entire human race. He is a hardy pioneer breaking fresh ground in a pestilential region, a reformer striving to realize a fruitful idea which the most advanced of his foreign colleagues are contented to praise or ignore. His exertions to bring about a new moral ordering of society—the one sheet anchor of humanity to-day—have direct bearings upon all the world-problems to which the war has imparted actuality.

For the European public Obregón's significance lies less in his achievements as a Mexican statesman—remarkable though these are—than in his influence as the spokesman and leader of one of the most beneficent movements known to history. This movement, now world-wide, is neither intellectual nor economic, it is essentially ethical. One may roughly describe it as a growing reaction against the systematic subordination of the destinies of humanity to the meanest interests of one or other of its least worthy members, as a series of revolts against the institutions and traditions on which that system reposes and an earnest endeavour to build up a new structure



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on a sounder foundation. In this revolt Obregón leads the van. In the task of construction he is the first ruler to show what the new ideas of moral order can achieve under the most discouraging conditions. Unlike so many other public workers he is not a disciple of any of the recognized teachers of sociology, although his conceptions tally with those of the ablest. He is always original without ever trying to be so. His knowledge, such as it is, flows from the best sources, experience and intuition, and his working is always revolutionary in the sense that it is ethically constructive. There is nothing more revolutionary than truth and justice as directives of public polity.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the structure of human society had been sapped imperceptibly. Since the shock of the world war it has been sensibly crumbling. Confusion prevails everywhere. The traditional conception of a State handed down by the Romans is fast degenerating into a monstrous caricature. One discerns everywhere States within States, uncrowned monarchs and anonymous trusts, holding sway over Governments, scraps of paper in lieu of laws and compacts, usurped rights and privileges overshadowing duties and obligations. "Balkanization" which is the ruin of Europe, is likewise working havoc to the larger community of mankind in the form of never-ending conflicts between racial and national interests and of the atomization of responsibility. The mere anticipation of war is fructified by Governments as that form of necessity which disregards law and justifies oppression. The prevailing policy—imperialism—ignores morality and hallows crime. As a consequence, the gross inequality and injustice which the feudal system of yore fastened upon social classes, are now being imposed on the entire human family. Races are divided into inferior and superior, nations are bartered like chattels, and penal sanctions are carried out by military Generals on the battlefield. Collectivity—almost a crime amongst the unprivileged—is supplanted by Nietzschean hero-worship, justice is displaced by violence, while systematic effort, is deliberately directed to purposes of destruction.

These evils are not of yesterday. But they have never been so palpable or unmitigated as at present, nor were they ever before so thoroughly realized by the masses. It needed the war of peoples and its sequel to arouse mankind to a keener sense of the calamities which they portend and to move it to

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eradicate their causes and devise a better social framework. But even yet the masses have not got beyond an inarticulate craving with fitful outbursts of blind frenzy while statesmen and politicians are still lost in the labyrinthine windings of reparations, inflation, "sanctions" and the repayment of debts.

On the new Continent, however, a very different spectacle is unfolding itself to the gaze of the few who have eyes to see. There, unnoticed by the rest of the globe, two practical schemes of world reconstruction are being worked out on diametrically opposite lines, in the name of the loftiest principles and by unprecedented methods which invite sharp scrutiny. The Washington State Department stands sponsor for the one and the President of Mexico for the other. Each system being the negation of the other, the struggle between them bids fair to be as relentless as it will be dramatic. In the limelight of the theatre during the first act stand Presidents Obregón and Harding, not as personal adversaries, very far from that, but as exponents of mutually incompatible systems which they are conscientiously carrying out and which they seem minded to uphold with the steel-knit strength of inflexible resolve.

Mr. Harding is at once a fervent Christian and a Yankee politician, and the religious influences which dominate his sense of duty also shape his ideals of social order and human progress. He is conscientious by training, theocratic by tradition, and uncompromising on principle. Seeking and finding the sanction of Heaven for his every public act, he is in some sort, the Vicar of Providence, and his will to carry out its supposed behests is therefore as inflexible as that of Samuel who calmly "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." Now, if the premises on which such a man conducts a nation's affairs are grounded, his conclusions are unquestionably logical and his action morally right. But, if the premises should turn out to be merely the products of his early training and environment, and the reverse of flawless, then he belongs to the category of those well-meaning, high-principled men who, under the Judges of Israel, smote the defenceless inhabitants of the promised land and under the Puritans of his own country burned harmless old women for the good of mankind. An administrator of this type may be compared to a clock which goes with absolute regularity, but being set to the wrong hour, leads everyone

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astray, whereas a timepiece that has stopped altogether shows the right time at least twice in twenty-four hours.

If one may judge by his public utterances, Mr. Harding, like his co-religionist Mr. Hughes, holds that Providence to-day works out its plans as of old through the instrumentality of a chosen people, whose mission is to sow the good seed, weed out the tares, make the earth a fit abode for the sifted generations of the future, disregard the precepts that bind the common run of humanity and that the inhabitants of the United States are this privileged community whose trustee and leader is the President for the time being. Congruously with this conception, Mr. Harding, like the King in the parable of the New Testament, sends forth his servants into the highways and bids all that they find to his hospitable house. And woe unto those who have not on a wedding garment, which in the case of the Latin American States means a treaty of "amity and commerce." They are bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness as were the peoples of Haiti and Santo Domingo. This theological way of regarding society and its aims supplies a partial explanation of those peculiar dealings of the United States with other countries which fill the European Philistine with amazement. In this connection, however, one must be careful not to identify a number of greedy capitalists, scheming politicians and old-world Puritans with the generous, warm-hearted people of the United States.

Obregón, whose ideas are free from all theological streaks, takes a broader view of society and its needs. He conceives the whole human race as a single organism of which nations and individuals are the members and holds that these must learn to think and work so that the rhythm of each shall be in unison with that of all. Far from admitting that any one people is warranted in holding another in leading strings, he maintains that each has its own mission to fulfil, should be free, therefore, from mechanical fetters and bound to the others as firmly as is feasible by moral ties. Views and theories, he holds, are untrustworthy measures by which to judge men and policies, a much safer standard being what these views and theories have made of them and their work. These speak a language which all can understand, and he exhorts the world to hearken to it. The illustrious inmate of the White House, on the other hand, harks back to the Old Testament

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for a social framework which he would fain Americanize by way of readjusting it to the present needs of humanity. And, odd though it may seem, he is able, to his own satisfaction, to blend together in a single synthesis, all-devouring capitalism and revealed religion—which are the only international institutions that have resisted the wave of the world war—and to fashion these into an instrument for that financial imperialism and economic interpenetration which he regards as world-reform.

Both Presidents are laudably eager to deliver mankind from the savagery of appeals to the sword as a means of settling misunderstandings, but they adopt very different tactics. Mr. Harding begins by a definition of war drawn from the new Yankee Dictionary of Diplomacy which is somewhat disconcerting. He refuses, for instance, to apply the term to the invasion, subjection and military occupation of any of the Latin-American republics of the Caribbean or the Mexican Gulf, however much blood may be shed in the process. Towns may be bombarded, villages burned to ashes, the inhabitants killed and many of the survivors imprisoned and cruelly tortured by United States marines and their handy men. But as these things occur only in the process of “cleaning up,” they do not constitute war and are labelled only *tacenda*—deeds which the Censor must see are not bruited abroad by the newspaper Press.

Moreover, Mr. Harding and those whose ideas he is realizing, are quite as keen as the imperialist rulers of Europe to secure for their country those financial, industrial and financial boons which were hitherto attained only as the spoils of war after sanguinary and victorious campaigns. And, owing to its vast, hoarded wealth, natural resources, large population and brand new nomenclature, the United States can obtain from its neighbours to-day by dint of energetic representations and veiled threats, those lucrative advantages which were formerly reserved for military superiority tested on the battlefield. For great nations harried by their own troubles resignedly abandon claims, cede rights and accept compromises rather than risk a war with the mighty Republic, while blood shed by the latter for a moral purpose among the lesser States will no longer be accounted war but only a matter of “domestic concern,” like a prohibitive tariff.

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Those are the outlines of the new polity of world reconstruction. Quickened with such adjuncts as the theory of the inferiority of races, the moral duty of the strong to "uplift" the weak, and other like apophthegms, it has enabled the United States to annex more than half of the Mexican Republic, to establish a protectorate over several of the Caribbean States and, by dint of financial pressure cleverly exerted, to obtain the whip hand of Peru. Encouraged by these acquisitions, the Washington State Department has proclaimed its resolve to discharge the functions of moral ruler of the universe, setting the pace and fixing the duration of all human progress. The spread of this theory and the peculiar flavour of its fruits have as yet attracted little attention on the old Continent. Europe's turn to experience what they mean has not yet come. In Latin-America they are irreverently styled "financial imperialism flavoured with Yankee godliness."

It is of the greatest moment that those who have faith in the solidarity of the human race should watch the vicissitudes of this silent struggle and turn the searchlight of publicity upon the tactics of its respective combatants. For everything that money, intrigue and poisonous calumny can do is being methodically done to obscure the issues and put the world on a false scent. But it is still possible to descry on one side a few men of principle, who put their faith in duty towards all, irrespective of results, and on the other corporations, trusts and political caucusses operating with gold and mediæval tortures, employing spies, professional propagandists, plot-weavers, revolution-mongers and chiefs of bands who have neither country nor religion nor ideal and sell to the highest bidder what is still left to them—their courage, their cunning and their lives.

All that the former group desires is that the real issues between these two camps should be clearly understood, and that if heinous crimes are perpetrated, they should be known for what they are instead of being decked out as "moral purges" and "painful duties" of the white superman towards his half-savage wards.

Those who believe that either moral law or brute force must henceforth rule the world, ought not to turn away in indifference while the issue is being decided. Society is in danger. It is true that confusion prevails everywhere and that some remedy must be found. But, deplorable though the consequences

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of the present chaotic state undoubtedly are, they constitute a lesser evil than would be the identification of the sordid interests of a plutocratic faction with those of humanity.

The outcome of that imperialist polity is, indeed, peace of a kind, peace as mechanical as that once immortalized by Tacitus. But it may well be doubted whether plutocratic imperialism will be generally recognized as that agency for moral advancement after which the world is blindly groping. For one thing, it does not connote the repudiation of injustice. It merely bestows upon it another and more attractive name. Neither does it brook such relative equality as is attainable and indispensable to fruitful co-operation among men. On the contrary. It is the pulverizing of the weak by the strong and therefore war of another kind, but still war. The coveted objects are the same as of yore, only the means of laying hands on them have altered, and are even less conducive to subsequent brotherhood than guns and warships. A people despoiled of its substance and shorn of its independence will hardly be reconciled to poverty and tutelage by being told that the methods and labels of the despoiler differ from those of bygone times and entitle him to special reverence and gratitude.

Obregón, who is a warm friend and sincere admirer of the people of the United States, is also the exponent of a set of ideas which, however moderately one may state them, are incompatible with those of President Harding. He cares little about mere forms and much about the substance. He argues that the effective causes of war may be reduced to national and racial hatred begotten of ignorance and fostered by false teaching, and that no mechanical contrivances can root out these. Treaties for the maintenance of peace, like laws for the enforcement of morality, are as nets set to catch the wind. History bears out this statement, and contemporary history more forcibly than any other.

Commenting on the Washington Conference, President Obregón put forward his idea as follows: "If mankind has, indeed, arrived at the painful conclusion that the parallel lines along which material and moral progress ought to have run have been totally forsaken, and that we now find ourselves in a stage of material and moral culture which provides only our own perverted instincts with greater and more perfect means of destruction, then, perhaps, it is time that this truth, bitter

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and painful though it be, should find an echo in the consciences of all men, and that we should seek in morality and science a last refuge from ruin and a beacon to direct human activity across new paths; that we should confess the enormity of our errors and recognize that all human beings as well as all nations are entitled to the same rights and are liable to the same duties, and that privileges were first created for their own behoof, by those who wielded the brute force with which they destroyed the rights of their fellow-men. Possibly in this mood and in this way we may succeed in bequeathing to future generations a state of things less baneful than that which we are at present attempting to ameliorate.”\*

In his own country Obregón and his whole-hearted fellow-workers, de la Huerta, Calles and Vasconcelos, have set the example of preparing the people to play its part in the new ordering. Education for the many and re-education for all have been auspiciously begun and are being strenuously pursued. The international bankers who recently represented Mexico's creditors† are said to have been scandalized at the large sum of money set apart by Obregón's Government for mere educational purposes, and to have courteously expostulated with the Mexican Finance Minister on the subject. It certainly is a new departure in statecraft and one that may prove dangerous to the old systems in Imperialist States. But Obregón believes in its efficacy, and moves forward serenely on his way. He would agree with that wise Emperor of China‡ who, in a famous edict, wrote: “Laws may check the evil-minded for a time but education alone can tame men permanently. He, therefore, who is foolish enough to rely upon statutes in lieu of laying the main stress upon training is forsaking the essential for the secondary.” What more forcible proof of the truth of this utterance is needed than the fate of the laws, treaties and programmes of European States for the establishment of peace and neighbourly relations, and the hopeless state of civil strife and anarchy into which Europe has already sunk?

\* Cf. President Obregón's article on the Washington Conference in the *English Review*, January, 1922.

† In New York in June, 1922.

‡ Kanghi, a monarch of the Mandchu Dynasty and contemporary of Louis XIV. of France.

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Not only are illiterates everywhere in the Republic being taught to read and write, but also their duties as citizens of Mexico and the world are being deeply impressed upon them. Citizens of the world ! The term has a novel by-taste which the withstanders of all that is new are unable to stomach. Nor is it only the word that shocks their sensibilities. The system of education is still more obnoxious to them. For the deadly virus of selfish, all-coveting nationalism which elsewhere is being instilled into the minds of the young through the falsehoods of "history" is being ruthlessly eliminated in Mexico by the iconoclast Minister of Public Instruction. If certain politicians in Washington sometimes mistake the United States for the Kingdom of Heaven, and its history for the *Acta Sanctorum*, Mexican statesmen, on the contrary, are having their national defects plainly pointed out by foreigners as well as by the historians of their own race and country. If truth, even to this limited extent, were allowed full scope in the educational systems of all countries, what a change would result in the attitude of peoples towards each other !

A kindred spirit animates the Mexico of President Obregón in her intercourse with her neighbours. With justice and generosity the financial and other claims of foreign States and individuals have been met, and many of the losses made good which under former Presidents had been inflicted upon them. The national debt has been recognized. Compensation for damage sustained during the Revolution will be made. In short, Mexico has qualified for a clean bill of health from every point of view.

The new doctrine of the whole-hearted co-operation of all nations and peoples for the fulfilment of the moral mission of the human race is thus being systematically put in practice for the first time by Obregón and his circle of fellow-workers. The beginnings are modest, lapses are many and stumbling-blocks formidable. None the less, headway is being slowly but perceptibly made. It is a cheering spectacle on which the flashlight of history should be turned.

All at once, however, a cry was heard commanding the toilers to halt and condemning their tendencies as heretical. President Harding peremptorily summoned the Mexican people to enter forthwith into the orbit of the United States and accept



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the rôles of victim and herald of the new gospel of financial imperialism and the overlordship of the chosen people. Having had a compact drawn up after the model of many others, he called upon President Obregón to disregard his oath to the Constitution and sign it. Refusal would be punished with rigour, it was added; Obregón and his Government would be deprived of official recognition and consequently of the financial credit needed for internal reforms. It was superfluous to add that another result of this boycott would be to encourage revolts against the Obregón Government on the part of ambitious adventurers whose main qualification for power is their readiness to act as the tools of the Washington politicians and New York financiers. For Samuel never stopped to think of Agag's widow and children when he hewed him in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, neither has President Harding troubled himself about the consequences to a high-spirited nation of his arbitrary fiat.

Mexico's answer to this edict was a courteous *Non possumus*. And this closed the first act of the drama.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TWO SCHEMES OF WORLD RECONSTRUCTION

THE unequal struggle between the apostles of a plutocratic world-empire and those who are working for the grand solidarity of all nations is now going forward. The great capitalists and intriguing politicians of New York and Washington invoke the doctrine of the White Man's burden and quote Scripture for indefensible acts which they dare not submit to Congress for the sanction of the nation. The statesmen of Mexico on their side have appealed to the conscience and bespoken the moral support of mankind, but in the din of war in three Continents their voices were drowned.

To the credit of the North American people it should be said that it has shown the stuff it is made of by courageously taking the Mexican side against its own politicians. Several States have passed resolutions in their legislatures demanding the official recognition of Obregón's Government. The Press has tardily recognized his sincerity and belauded his high purpose. Whatever slur, therefore, may be cast by history on those who are answerable for the iniquitous persecution of a weak and well-meaning country will assuredly not fall on the high-minded people of the United States.

It is as the herald of the new era of collectivity, peace and concord, and as the adversary of imperialism, race-hatred and of the lies with which these are bolstered up, that President Obregón is now a claimant for the attention and moral sympathy of foreign peoples. The cause for which he stands is that of all men of good will throughout the world. It is easy to belittle it as the dream of a visionary, but so seemed the schemes of all those who have hitherto helped humanity along the road of development. No ideal is ever realized, no lofty aim ever fully attained. But neither is any good cause ever lost until it is

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finally abandoned by its own champions. And the events of his life show that Obregón is not the man to look back after having put his hand to the plough. One might aptly liken him to fire which may be extinguished but will never grow cold. He works in accordance with the maxim of that dervish who said: "Do your best and cast it into the ocean. If the fishes do not recognize it, Allah will."

Scattered throughout the world there are numerous associations endeavouring in various ways to realize a new politico-social scheme which shall establish better and more stable conditions for the living and working of nations and individuals. These leagues might be well advised in selecting as their chief a man so well fitted as Obregón not merely to propound the new ideas but to carry some of them a considerable distance along the road to embodiment in institutions. Already the South American republics look up to him as to their national leader. The work to which he has set his hand—the remoulding of the temper of a nation—is beset with difficulties so formidable that only a born optimist could undertake it with hope. And yet neither he nor his fellow-workers display a tendency to wavering or misgiving. "One should never begin a task," he once remarked, "which one is not sure of bringing to a successful issue, nor abandon it afterwards." I asked him whether he might not be in error when assessing the fitness of the Mexican people for the functions which he would fain allot to it. He answered: "My experience is that people are never as one imagines them, but that time and treatment make them so. You must always deal with them in their own way, not in yours, and above all things treat them with confidence. Distrust begets more errors than trust."

In the annals of his own country Obregón will figure either as its saviour or as the victim of its enemies, who for their own sordid purposes refused to let it be saved; while in the history of the world he will probably stand out like the Indian King Asoka as a champion and organizer of the only type of social reconstruction compatible with the ever-pressing needs and conducive to the highest aims of the human race.

Obregón believes in his country, his people and humanity, and in service to these as firmly as the early Christian martyrs face to face with the lions believed in God. To this faith he sacrificed all that he prized in life, took up the uncongenial

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profession of arms and faced many dangers, buoyed up by the hope of putting an end to the fierce feuds as ruinous as they were aimless which were wrecking the Republic and decimating the people. And when after years of hard campaigning and brilliant successes which strained his powers to the uttermost, he had attained his main end, instead of seizing the highest prize, which was well within his reach and his deserts, he yielded it unhesitatingly for the sake of concord to another whose worth and services when weighed against his own were as dust in the balance. For to his thinking the cause alone was great, and fidelity to that its own reward.

Boycotted by the three leading Governments—Britain, France and the United States—Mexico under Obregón has entered the arena of world history as unpretentiously and unexpectedly as David entered the valley of Elah to do battle with Goliath of Gath. She has propounded fateful problems on the American Continent which despite money and marines will yet leaven the plutocratic mass there until it is finally transformed, and she has submitted solutions which sooner or later will strike deep roots everywhere. Now the circumstance that Mexico is the scene of these startling innovations is in some respects a distinct help to the success of the momentous experiment, while in others it is a severe handicap both to the venture and to him who is making it.

For one thing, the Republic was spiritually and socially exhausted. It had forgotten its secular traditions, allowed most of its institutions to fall into decay, and destroyed many of the social and political forms inherited from the Spaniards. In a word, reconstruction from the foundation upwards was an obvious and imperative necessity. And this was a positive advantage. The first question which then became actual was whether the old framework should be rebuilt agreeably to the scheme elaborated in the United States, or those new forms should be tried which conduce to a permanent betterment of the reciprocal relations of individuals, classes and nations. And to this query Obregón and his friends, de la Huerta and Calles, made answer in no equivocal terms, arousing the resentment of the great Northern Republic.

On the other hand, Mexico is remote from the recognized centres of modern progress, is peopled by races which the indolent public has been disciplined into stigmatizing as

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fundamentally inferior, and in consequence the notion that any fruitful initiative can emanate from there is ridiculed abroad as inconceivable. This legend is perpetuated by the friends of intervention in New York and Washington, whose agents are endeavouring by intrigue and corruption to make it approximately true.

Another serious disadvantage peculiar to the country was the temper of the people. Prolonged anarchy, during which every man's hand was raised against every man, fostered a spirit of lawlessness and intractability which it is hard to overcome even by education and impossible to tame by force. The primitive individual who had just learned to read became indoctrinated with absurd notions about his indefeasible rights, by which he meant unlimited licence, and ignored corresponding duties. The bureaucracy looked upon the nation as its prey and threw off all sense of responsibility. The army became a rabble which responded only to the lure of plunder. The clergy was a powerful organization which threw the weight of its influence into the scale of reaction, whether the source of this were native or foreign. In a word, the matter in which the fateful experiment had to be wrought was eminently unsuitable, and effective instruments were entirely lacking. Everything had to be created almost out of nothing.

But the most insidious and redoubtable opposition came from the great Northern Republic, the mainspring of whose action was given out as solicitude for peace and a sense of moral duty. Now these motives are always worthy of respect, and if in politics words bore the same meanings as in everyday life they would also carry conviction. It will not be denied that occasions have arisen when this or that little Caribbean republic fell into such a desperate state of anarchy and disorder that real help and guidance, were such attainable, would have been an act of pure humanity, and the people of the United States would have given it. To my thinking, Mexico itself was at one time moving rapidly towards the same quagmire and in like need of help and guidance. For the sovereignty of a people does not entail the right to run amok and devote its energies to the work of destruction. But unhappily in the United States it is the wealthy corporations that rule and not the people, and in their dialect moral motives are the merest pretexts—help signifies spoliation and guidance is synonymous with political tutelage.

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In a word, the vulture kisses the chicken until there is not a feather left.

It is safe to say that Mexico would have gone the way of the Caribbean republics had it not been for Obregón, who in the nick of time put an end to civil war and made an excellent beginning of reconstruction. His appearance on the scene was therefore a keen disappointment to all those adventurers who had already discounted the spoils which intervention would have placed within their reach. Politicians, financiers, oil-men and marines, who had waited impatiently during the war in Europe, saw all their schemes thwarted by a mere Mexican general. The idea was gall and wormwood to them and they refused to let loose of their prey. They and their agents defamed him, besmirched his fellow-workers, spread reports that he was incurably ill, and finally sought to have objections made to his election on constitutional grounds! The climax of absurdity was reached when a personal appeal was privately made to the General's patriotism by the *chargé d'affaires* of a foreign realm, who adjured him to push the candidature of one of the favourites of the United States. This candidate had already secretly offered a bribe to a foreign military attaché, on condition that he too should further his election by putting pressure on the members of the electing body. For this service, besides promising a large sum of money, he had given an undertaking to adjust his policy to the Washington ideal. The answer of the military attaché is not on record, but the *chargé d'affaires* went so far as to tempt General Obregón with the promise that recognition would be accorded by his Government to the new Mexican administration if presided over by the gentleman of his choice!

Such manoeuvres, possible only in Mexico, give one the measure of the sincerity of public professions on the lips of foreign statesmen. The Mexicans commenting on this breach of international comity assumed that the inducement offered by the *chargé d'affaires* may have been unauthorized by the Government which he represented, but they added that when the matter was brought to the cognizance of that Government it thought fit to ignore the incident. One can readily imagine the fierce tempest of passion which such intermeddling at election time would have unchained in the United States, where the precedent established by the unceremonious dismissal of

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one of our own ambassadors from Washington some years ago, which was the result of a private letter of advice sent by him to one of the voters, is not yet forgotten. But international law and comity, like ordinary morality, vary considerably, according to climate and circumstances.

The failure of that singular manœuvre was the signal for the spinning of dangerous intrigues, the launching of alarming reports and propaganda as demoralizing as that which the belligerents practised during the world war. Whenever a reform was undertaken, it was twisted by those foreign "hustlers" into a crime against the rights of American citizens or a heresy against the Monroe doctrine. From Washington those shifty scouts and their direct employers in the States solicited and obtained diplomatic remonstrances, protests and even threats against the Mexican administration. Reform in Mexico thus became a dangerous business, a sort of egg dance, with heavy penalties for a false step. Most of the schemes for the betterment of the Mexican people were found to impair the interests, encroach upon the rights or jeopardize the security of American citizens. When the Mexican State asserted its ownership of the oil in the earth, it committed an act of robbery. When it decided to reclaim land by parcelling out vast estates, some of which contained tens of thousands of square miles, among citizens able and willing to cultivate it, Mexico was roundly accused of Bolshevism, and Yankee agents hurriedly made contracts with the native proprietors so as to be able to enlist their Government against the Bill. When the land was nationalized, word went forth that Mexico was overrun with agents from Moscow, and "100 per cent. Americans" were exhorted to invoke the Monroe doctrine against the rise of a communist state on the new continent. On the appearance of a few Japanese labourers—sober, industrious men—imported by American companies of the State of Sonora, Mexico was charged with harbouring the yellow races and creating a peril for the United States, one of whose moral duties is to watch over racial purity. If a railway train was held up after the fashion of the United States, the crime was proof positive that there is no security for life or property in the republic. In short, these guardians of morality and purity contrive to find a hair in a Mexican new laid egg.

The law, which wisely or unwisely sets narrow limits to the

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activities of religious corporations in the Mexican republic and permits the exercise of ecclesiastical functions only to natives, is objected to in Washington as a violation of the indefeasible rights of English-speaking Americans to save their neighbours' souls. "How," they ask, "can we fulfil our mission as civilizers and culture-bearers, if we are not permitted to preach the saving doctrines of Christianity in which we ourselves believe? The Mexican constitution which enacts this prohibition is an outrageous violation of the Monroe doctrine and must be revised without more ado." As yet the prohibition of alcoholic drinks has not found a place in the programme of these purifiers of Latin American republics, but to my knowledge a large bribe was offered some time ago to the governor of a Mexican State to induce him to proclaim prohibition.

The Statute empowering the Mexican Executive to expel undesirable foreigners from the country in the same way as they are expelled from France and other European States is also declared to be a shameless breach of the Monroe Doctrine and unbearable to self-respecting Yankees. The tolerance which allows free speech and liberty of the press as in France, Italy, Spain and Belgium is condemned as an encouragement to Bolshevism, and arbitrary deviations from it are demanded in advance as one of the rights inherited by Americans of the Monroe persuasion. And so on to the end of the chapter.

The original manner in which Obregón has met each of these demands will challenge the approval of all who find pleasure in the triumphs of right over brute force. Instead of imitating those of his predecessors who had laid in munitions, increased the strength of the army and gone far afield in quest of foreign alliances against the one potential enemy of their country, he disbanded a large part of the national forces, devoted the money saved to educational purposes, proclaimed his resolve to be just and friendly towards all foreign peoples, and in particular Mexico's neighbours, satisfying their grounded claims, and with this resolve then to appeal to the conscience of the civilized world. "If the world in the new era is to be ruled by force," he said, "Mexico has nothing to hope. And if morality predominates she will have nothing to fear. Consciousness of this truth will serve as the mainspring of our policy."

With Obregón this mode of procedure was no mere matter of tactics, no manœuvre to gain time or score a point, but the



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corollary of his conception of the new ordering. In shaping his foreign policy according to moral principles he never stopped to consider whether or no any diplomatic advantage was to be gained thereby. To the enemies, native and foreign, of his Government and country, who confidently expected from him the suicidal tactics of his predecessor and had adjusted their hopes and their conduct to these, this attitude came as a painful shock. That any appeal to moral principles should emanate from a Republic in decay and an "inferior race" was almost inconceivable and was certainly not foreseen. To shift the issue between the United States Government and Mexico to the region of morality and to constitute the civilized nations of the world the arbiters of the merits of the quarrel was a move most unpalatable and disconcerting to the predatory schemers in the United States. On such grounds as this they could hope for no success. But they soon recovered their serenity and cast around for fresh weapons. At the worst they could deaden the blow. An appeal to the conscience of the civilized world could take effect only through publicity, and the organs of publicity were almost all in the hands or under the influence of the plutocracy of the North American Republic. Suppression of facts is one of their trump cards. And ever since then no exertions have been spared to hide or distort every occurrence favourable to Mexico while inventing reports damaging to her credit and prestige. The results face one in every quarter of the globe. Europe knows less about the Mexican Republic than about Timbuctoo or the canals of Mars, and the little it thinks it knows is often false.

That is one of the main reasons why the civilized world has not yet felt justified in uttering its reprobation of the corrosive work of those mischief-makers and adventurers who dexterously mask under the cloak of altruism and morality designs which have for their result and presumably for their object the moral and economic ruin of Mexico, and seek to conceal the reform work now going on there behind a dense fog of falsehood. None the less, glimpses are occasionally to be had of what is being achieved behind the artificial smoke screen. In Spain, for example, the truth is beginning to be discerned and proclaimed. "The United States," writes one Spanish press organ, "is going ahead with dissimulation and preparing for the total domination of the continent across the Atlantic . . .

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It is impossible to deny that the United States has displaced more than eighty per cent. of European influence in the markets of America and will soon be the arbiter and sole master of these immense markets.”\*

When at the close of the year 1921 Obregón uttered his appeal for universal disarmament, the influential press of South America proclaimed him the spiritual leader of the Latin American race and confirmed its announcement later on when he issued his remarkable Bill for compensating and pensioning injured and aged working men. “To-day,” we read in one of the most important Peruvian journals,† “Obregón is the intellectual Mandatory of Latin America . . . This is not the first time that we pay a tribute of applause to the President of Mexico for his sincerity. The same voice of approval went up from the entire South American press when the President of that Republic gave written expression to his views on universal disarmament . . . Alvaro Obregón is an intrepid and truth-loving ruler.” New York and Boston journals have endorsed this verdict. It is a good sign when a man’s contemporaries are stirred by his sterling qualities to offer him during his lifetime such high and spontaneous tribute, inasmuch as by the conventional standard of values the worth of a prominent public worker is insignificant while he lives and invaluable after his death.

Enough has been said to account for the fact that no sketch, however summary, of Obregón’s life can be compressed within the limits either of pure biography or of Mexican history. From his first appearance on the public scene his activity has been constantly interwoven with issues of thrilling international interest, and to-day he is become in some sort the principal foreman of those modest toilers who labour unflinchingly at the world’s work. Although a son of his country, reared in its traditions, customs and conceptions, his energies dependent for their unfolding upon opportunities offered by the vicissitudes of its existence—he was also a free moral agent endowed to an unusual degree with the gift of influencing those vicissitudes and creating those opportunities. And this gift he sought to put to the best possible use. Since he quelled the forces of anarchism

\* *La Libertad* of May 11th, 1921. See the remarkable article published there by the deputy Barcia y Trelles. See also *El Debate* and *El Tiempo* of Madrid.

† *El Tiempo*, May, 1922.

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and first took his place among the leaders of his nation, no event of its history has been wholly untouched by his influence, nor since he rose to the highest post in the Republic has his Cabinet taken its stand towards any momentous problem without bringing it into definite relationship towards the larger outlook of world-reconstruction.

As circumstance has brought him into antagonism to that foreign junta which is compassing the domination of his country and of all Latin America, no biographical sketch however succinct would be complete without an exposé of the relations between the movement of which they are the organizers and the passive resistance of the Latin-Americans of whose aspirations and rights Mexico, in the person of Obregón, is become the exponent and champion. Nobody deplores this antagonism more intensely than himself nor is anybody more willing than he to make every reasonable sacrifice to avert it. He is an ardent admirer of the American people, whose remarkable achievements he has seen and appreciated in their own country. He recognizes their excellent qualities which he holds up to his own fellow citizens for imitation. He has cordially invited their co-operation in reconstructing the Mexican Republic. In short, his tactics are inspired by the wish to prove to them by overt acts that he and his countrymen are truly desirous of living and working with them in lasting good fellowship.

It may not be amiss to record here one or two of the utterances of this Mexican man of action, which bring him into line with some of the most eminent thinkers and reformers of ancient and modern times. One day, when passing in review the life and character of his predecessor, President Diaz, he said : “One of the causes of his failure to help the Mexican people along the road of betterment was the favouritism which he displayed towards this or that section of it. He mistook a part for the whole. Now a nation, nay the human race, should be envisaged and dealt with as a unity—like a great tree with its roots, branches, boughs, blossoms, fruits and leaves—every organ being in touch with every other. Diaz may have thought that the masses, because uneducated and inarticulate, were also indifferent to what was being done. If so, he was deluded. Even if the people had uttered no complaint their instincts were active and they were moved by sentiments as intense as the most forcibly expressed ideas.” On another

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occasion he said : " A political community, assuming it to be properly fed and housed, is still in need of many things. But two are absolutely indispensable : a moral Government and an efficient system of moral education. Without these a State is sure to land ultimately in anarchy."

In reply to my question as to what he meant by saying that he intended to eschew politics altogether in his method of governance, Obregón replied : " Politics, judging by what I know of them, are the means by which one State protects its interests against those of other States. This protection alters its form according to the views taken of those interests by the nation's rulers. And these views are subject to frequent change. Now I hold that if men could be got to consider their national interests from the highest point of view, as identical with the well-being of humanity, there would be no such changes in their attitude, and politicians would be relegated to the ranks of the unemployed. And that is what we are striving after."

Talking about the rights of property—a subject which out of deference to the guardians of these rights in the United States can be mentioned only with bated breath—General Obregón said : " It is my opinion that every individual born into this world has the same right as every other to be able to live. He must of course work, but not as a beast of burden works, in return for barely enough rest and food to fit him to go on toiling until he sinks into the grave. A human being can justly claim an opportunity to unfold his faculties whatever they are, and it is immoral to force or cajole him into compacts with other individuals or companies by which he would forfeit this claim. What is it that creates the right to private property ? Obviously Society which gives to each what is his and lays down the conditions on which it will guarantee him possession. Property in land should be made contingent upon cultivation. To hold land and refuse either to cultivate it or to allow another citizen to cultivate it is incongruous, and when it is a question of vast estates, as in our country, it becomes an intolerable grievance."

Patriotism was another of the topics which I brought up to be tested by his theories.

" Mexicans," I observed, " are charged by some of their foreign critics with a lack of patriotism."

Obregón retorted : " A good deal might be usefully said

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about the meaning of that much abused word which, like religion, has been stretched to cover heinous crimes. In some countries it is identical with State-worship, hatred of other States being its obverse side. In all countries it has to be stamped artificially into the impressible minds of the young. It is never planted there by nature as is affection for your first home or the surroundings of your childhood. Of that artificial patriotism you will find no traces in Mexico. True, the welfare of the community calls for the highest sacrifices and in this country it does not call in vain, as the campaign under Juarez against Maximilian proves. But love of one's country is not the final stadium of cultural progress. Beyond country is the community of human kind. Unhappily it is not yet an organized community. The world is still far from that goal, but that is not a reason for standing still. One is goaded to action when one beholds the strenuous exertions systematically put forth in elementary and high schools to imbue the youth of each country with spurious patriotism, with the theory that their particular country exists for itself, is superior to all others and has the right, whenever opportunity offers, to extend its territory and influence at the expense of its neighbours. Now if the same methodic labour were applied to the inculcation of the saner teaching that each nation is bound by ties of kindred—which should be strengthened with those of morality—to the larger community of which it is a member, progress would indeed be swift. And to that end all efforts should be bent. Humanity is the bridge which connects the national—in the best sense of the word—with the international. And, in spite of many signs and tokens to the contrary, I believe that there is to-day a perceptible movement on the part of all nations to draw near that bridge. It is their present guides who are leading them astray."

## CHAPTER III

### MY ACQUAINTANCE WITH OBREGÓN

WHEN I first struck up acquaintanceship with Alvaro Obregón he was a successful General whose reputation was confined to his own country, and even there most of its inhabitants seemed disposed, like all peoples of the world, to wait patiently till he died before recognizing his public services. He had too sedulously shunned the broad avenues that led to contemporary fame and prestige to be popular, belonged to no party, had eschewed political intrigue, was free from selfishness and personal ambition and cultivated manly independence of spirit. Qualities such as these are not passports to favour in any community, and least of all in a country like Mexico where love of order and solicitude for social stability were caviare to the million. And having reached the highest eminence in the profession of arms, and freed the land from the curse of civil strife, Obregón was rash enough to belittle his triumphs and to say that war is always too high a price to pay for internal peace and that more efficacious methods must be employed to secure it in the future.

The Catholic party and the friends of the Carranza regime frankly detested him, foreigners and interventionists feared him as a possible reformer who might reconstruct the country and enable it to dispense with moral uplifting from without, and even the labour party, suspending its judgment, regarded him as a man on probation. Fantastic legends were woven about him for the purpose of justifying the various attitudes assumed by the parties and factions whose interests were deemed to be jeopardized by his rise to eminence, and I was warned by foreigners and Mexicans alike that Obregón was a danger to Church, State, country and also to the neighbours of his country. It is but fair to say that many of my informants believed the extravagant tales with which they regaled me. I was assured

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that the goal towards which he was hastening, the track in which he moved and the methods which he employed marked him as a revolutionary bandit whose one aim in life was power and the boons which power confers. Hence I set him down hypothetically as a typical Mexican "General" comparable to one of the Italian *condottieri* of the Middle Age; and he regarded me, in turn, as one of those foreign correspondents whose object was to put insidious queries in the hope of receiving compromising replies.

Our first meeting was, therefore, as disappointing as it must necessarily be under those misconceptions. Subsequently I discovered that Obregón's personality is marked by a healthy dualism which has stood him in excellent stead throughout his chequered career. To the Spanish novelist, Ibañez, and many another scribe come to cross-examine him, he presented only that side of his personality which is revealed by application of the Wise Man's advice about the treatment to be shown to the unwise. Our acquaintanceship was struck up at a fourth-class hotel where the General was staying. I found him in a shabby room almost bare of furniture, seated at a plain table on which only a loaded revolver and a sheet of paper lay, and as he rose and stretched out his left hand to greet me, I perceived that he had lost the right. As I sat down to tell him the object of my visit, I had, as I have said, a more or less definite caricature of him in my mind's eye while he, on his side, was convinced that I had come, like so many other English-speaking foreigners, to see how I "might entangle him in his talk." The conversation which ensued on this basis was little better than a brief bout of word-fencing which left us both where we had been before, whereupon I cut short the interview.

Subsequently, having learned that I had come with a perfectly open mind, he sent his Secretary to request me to return. I declined, but stated that I should probably soon be somewhere near his home in Sonora and might call on him there if he gave me permission in advance. This announcement evoked an invitation to accompany him on a long journey to his house in Nogales which he intended to begin within thirty hours. After some hesitation I accepted the offer and went with him, my mind still filled with the circumstantial tales current in the foreign circles, only the fringe of which I had ever touched. Nor was it until somewhat later and after pro-

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longed intercourse that I discarded the caricature and beheld him as he was and is—conventional, jovial, superficial with the ordinary run of men; thoughtful, serious and illuminating with the few.

His conversational powers show to best effect in a company with the members of which he is intimate. In the easy flow of unrestrained conversation with those who relish the sincerities of human nature and appreciate what is best in a man, Obregón's mind reveals itself as a rich store of the flowers and fruits of wide and varied experience, while the original way in which the changefulness and undulancy of men and things strike him, the thoughts they evoke and the lessons they convey furnish one with the level of his intellectual potency. And his talk, withal, replete with anecdote and wit, never sinks into dullness. He has no postures of insincerity. He is always natural, although adapting himself to his temporary surroundings and falling without effort into the tone of the company. He has the gift of diffusing himself and communicating a something to his hearers which attracts and charms. His talk is then marked by candour, cheerfulness and elasticity of mind, which fascinate.

With strangers and in mixed society, he is studiously affable and reasonably reserved, never wears his heart on his sleeve nor a mask on his face. I have listened to scores of ordinary conversations between Obregón and chance visitors and also to his table talk with trusted friends, and was always struck by the distance that separates these two psychological aspects of the same individual.

My own intercourse with the Mexican statesman has been exceptionally close and intimate. I enjoyed the privilege of accompanying him on his historic journeys extending over thousands of miles through the Republic, first when he returned in triumph from the successful Revolution and later when he visited the southern and eastern States on what was erroneously termed an electioneering campaign but was really a tour of exploration.

"I must see the country and the people for myself," he said. "I hate to have to contemplate them through the semi-opaque leaves of official reports."

On those journeys by train, steamer, motor and carriage, he and I were continually together, spending hours every day



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in unimpeded and frank talk on most of the topics that exercise the ingenuity of mankind. We lived in wretched inns and tolerable hotels, travelled in railway carriages and vans filled with working men, were poisoned with the ptomaine of fish, fasted occasionally when there was nothing to eat, were painfully crushed by dense, enthusiastic crowds five and six times a day, were drenched with torrential rains and scorched with tropical heat. We heard the desires, the grievances, the aspirations of the various groups and individuals of the States through which we passed. Wherever Obregón was invited to a banquet—a very different sort of entertainment from what is known by this name in Europe—I went with him ; when he had to address the people from a balcony or a tribune in the public square, I was generally by his side ; and when he received the governors, municipal authorities and party chiefs to discuss the needs of the population, I was permitted to be present. Thus I heard him discuss proposals and schemes for the betterment of the country and the people, refuse and accept suggestions and criticize concrete plans of local amelioration after having first examined the land, the lakes or the rivers in question.

I also accompanied him on a long journey to Dallas, in Texas, and for a short while acted as his interpreter. Whithersoever he went he won the hearts and the active support of the responsive people of the United States who recognize a real man when they see him. Governors of States, Chambers of Commerce and heads of business firms waxed eloquent in his praise and spontaneously resolved to visit Mexico to be present at his inauguration. After he became President we also travelled together in the Republic, mixing with peasants, labourers, Indian fishermen and people of all conditions.

I found Obregón a genial companion and a staunch friend, always buoyant, entertaining and instructive, never obtrusive, dogmatic or tedious. An enemy to every kind of excess, he is abstemious in food and drink. Water is his ordinary beverage. During our journeys he invariably refused every kind of alcoholic liquors although he is by no means a teetotaller or a prohibitionist. In this connection I should like to narrate an amusing little episode that occurred in a town on the Pacific coast. I was out walking with the official representative of a foreign country, and on our return to the hotel, we found General Obregón sitting around a table in consultation with

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half a dozen of the municipal and State authorities. Seeing me he called out to me to join them. I looked up at my foreign companion interrogatively, desiring to learn whether he would like to be introduced. But he said emphatically that he must leave me.

On the following day I mentioned to him that I should have liked him to make the acquaintanceship of the future President of the Republic, but he replied :

“ Well, you see, I could not prevail on myself to go over to that nondescript circle of people, sit down and imbibe alcohol with them.”

As a matter of fact, none of them was imbibing any liquor—not even water, and my interlocutor was amazed to learn that General Obregón had never tasted any drink stronger than water—sometimes the reverse of limpid—during all our travels.

Obregón's serious conversation is current Mexican history in terse, graphic sketches and dramatic or comic pictures, the accuracy of which is due to his prodigious memory, whose stores are inexhaustible, the whole seasoned with a touch of humour which is Hibernian rather than Mexican. As has been said, it is only in private and at odd intervals that he reveals his inner self and the wide range of speculation in which his mind has indulged. He sees the universal in the local and interweaves threads of humanity in his schemes for national well-being. By dint of experience and induction he has discovered for himself many of the truths long since expounded by foreign thinkers of whose existence he is unaware. In a discussion he has the gift of seizing the gist of the matter, and he possesses the knack of setting it in correct perspective. He is free from party spirit, from shuffling and sophistry.

Some of the gaps, however, left by his early education had not yet been filled in. He knew little of ancient history, and his ideas about concrete foreign policy were fluid apart from a few sound basic conceptions. Unfortunately, he reads little, and his intercourse with foreigners of parts, although now fairly frequent, is not sufficiently sustained. His travels have never taken him beyond the United States and Cuba. He speaks no foreign tongues\* and he has had no experience in international politics, although he has had occasional glimpses of its seamy side. Of necessity, therefore, his notions of the policy, strivings

\* He reads French and to a limited extent English.

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and psychology of foreign governments are almost as hazy as are the views which foreign statesmen hold of the workings of the Mexican mind. They both operate with imaginary men and bodies, and the results are sometimes untoward. Obregón has, on several occasions, been naïve enough to accept the ostensible motives of Yankee politicians for their real ones. Obviously this drawback is fraught with greater danger to Mexico than to the Great Powers. I have heard, for example, the views of many Mexican politicians about their misunderstandings with the United States, and I make bold to say that they often started with gratuitous assumptions and failed to take into account facts and factors which are obvious and decisive. Their world of international politics is unreal.

But Obregón, conscious of these deficiencies, is eager to remedy them. He knows that he does not know and is ready to learn from those who do. He has the courage to face the ghosts of his former errors and possesses the secret of making them serviceable. During his toilsome journey on the road of self-development, many of his youthful prejudices fell away. Circumstance, the unerring assayer of the ore of talent, removed much of its drossy alloy. The only subject on which I seemed to detect traces of bias was the Catholic clergy—for he is generally as deliberate in his judgments as he is faithful in his attachments.

I duly visited his native place in Sonora, became acquainted with the Obregón clan, which is very numerous in the north, talked with the teachers who imparted to him all the elementary education he received, questioned his playmates and became conversant with his family history. And, during this close intercourse, and since, I can truly say that I have enjoyed his confidence to a degree which warrants the statement that I dispose of ample data for a fairly adequate judgment on his character, attainments and politico-social conceptions.

My impressions are distinctly favourable. I do not hesitate to affirm that some of the pen portraits of him hitherto limned and given to the world by foreigners are coarse caricatures. To put the matter succinctly, Obregón stands on a higher moral and intellectual level than his race. He is endowed in a greater degree with those special aptitudes which distinguish the people of the United States, and, in addition, he displays some of the most valuable traits of the Mexican race. Essentially a

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member of the class of doers, gifted with initiative and quick resolve, he never, under stress of action, falters, hesitates or reconsiders. He is of the same mind as Marshal Foch who wrote in my album: "To wage war is to act with decision and without fear of responsibility, after having deliberated." He states a question in which he himself is an interested party with fairness to his antagonist. He is chary of promising and punctual in executing. Pageant, rhetoric and every kind of bombast are abominations to him and he agrees with Spinoza, that when one applies one's mind to politics, it is as much as one can do to keep from laughing or groaning at the deeds which they inspire.

Obregón considers politics, as understood and practised in most countries, as a scourge of peoples and would fain substitute equity and plain dealing. Like Dean Swift, he holds that to make two ears of corn and two blades of grass grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, is to render a more valuable service to mankind than the best efforts of professional politicians from year's end to year's end. His respect for the rights and the personality of others, which is no mere form, has its source in his own sense of human dignity. Like M. Briand, he is a past master of the difficult art of saying No without offending the disappointed suitor and he seldom fails to use his expressive eyes in conjunction with his insinuating voice to soften the asperity of a refusal. Lastly, he seems to be quite capable of enlisting the services of men better informed on this or that subject than himself. Several distinguished and able compatriots of his deny him friendship and co-operation because, although they gladly forgive his mistakes, they cannot pardon him his superiority. Even friendship can seldom rise to this degree of generosity.

Applying the standards, then, by which I judged the late Count Witte, Venizelos, and other eminent men before they became generally known, to Alvaro Obregón, who, when I first met him, was still merely a "Mexican General" in the eyes of the majority of newspaper readers in the United States, and not even so much as that to the bulk of newspaper readers on the Continent of Europe, I had no hesitation in affirming that, for political vision; high moral purpose, skill and tact in dealing with men and controlling, modifying or utilizing great events, and also—a most important point—in appearing opportunely

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at the height of a national crisis, he is Mexico's strongest son, her "man of destiny."

He made me acquainted with his schemes of reconstruction, some parts of which I propose to dwell upon later on. For the moment I will content myself with characterizing them as comprehensive, statesmanlike, and, so far as a foreigner can judge, calculated to lift the Mexican State chariot from the Serbonian Bog into which his predecessors plunged it, and place it on the road of progress. Obregón has never yet set his hand to an enterprise without working it out to a satisfactory issue. None the less, it is not impossible that he should fail in this. If so, no other Mexican stands the slightest chance of succeeding. For he, and only he, wields a sufficiently powerful lever for the work. All that he now needs is a fulcrum. And, hitherto, every exertion has been put forward by the most powerful corporations and institutions to deny him that.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY DAYS

ALVARO OBREGÓN was born on a ranch in the district of Alamos in the north of Mexico,\* on the 17th February, 1880. His stock, supposed by some to be Hiberno-Mexican, is more probably Hispano-Mexican. By those who favour the former hypothesis, the name Obregón, although well-known in Spain, is taken for the Hispanicized form of O'Brien like the names O'Donoju for O'Donoghue and Gil for Hill. His features, especially the eyes, expressive, caressing, with an unmistakable Irish twinkle, as well as a number of other less prominent traits, impart colour to the supposition. He was the youngest of eighteen children, of whom nine are still living. Large families are common in Mexico, whose birth rate is among the highest in the world. But as all his brothers and sisters support themselves by honest labour, live very modestly, eschew politics, have never accepted any posts or emoluments from the Government and are therefore far removed from the limelight of the press, publicists generally assumed that Obregón was an only son. For otherwise, they reasoned, would not his brothers have followed in his footsteps and figured on the political scene in accordance with the time-honoured custom of the country ?

When Alvaro was a few months old, his father died, bequeathing to the widow a burden greater than she could bear in the guise of a numerous family and no financial resources. He had been a prosperous business man acquiring a competency in Mexico City, Cuernavaca and Siquisila, but like many of his compatriots he fell an innocent victim to political vindictiveness. His partner in business had fought on the side

\* In the State of Sonora.

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of the Emperor Maximilian and was punished by having all his property in Mexico City and Cuernavaca confiscated, all that remained to him being a house and land in Sonora. And these were ruined by a tremendous inundation. In the night of that catastrophe which destroyed many lives, Alvaro's mother saved her children by her quick resolve. Starting up from her sleep in her nightdress she carried the youngest in her arms and rushed off to the hills with the others, while the rain was falling in torrents and the cold numbed her limbs. Everywhere around her the neighbours were moaning and weeping but Señora Obregón kept silence and maintained her wonted serenity. To a friend who commented on her attitude she said :

“ When I see what others are going through I cannot complain. They have lost their houses and their children as well. We have lost only our property. Why should I repine ? ”

Some time later the fierce restless Yaqui Indians, settled by the Yaqui river, who have ever had a grievance and a grudge against the whites, suddenly rose up in arms, attacked these, drove off the few head of cattle belonging to Obregón's father and burned his house to ashes. From this blow he never recovered. Destitute of resources he decided to remain and work for a living in the village in which he was domiciled, and shortly afterwards he breathed his last, leaving his widow burdened with a numerous family and bereft of the means of supporting them.

But Señora Obregón who came of a family highly distinguished for intellectual and artistic gifts was endowed with moral energy, physical strength and a remarkably serene disposition ; and Schopenhauer's theory that the intellectual equipment of a man is an inheritance from his mother would seem to be borne out in the case of her youngest son.

In his native country I made the acquaintanceship of some thirty odd of his blood relations, including those from whom he received such education as they could bestow, and while there I learned a good deal of the family history. Among the stories told me of his mother's family, the fearless versatile Salidos—of one of which her sister was the heroine, made a dent in my memory and is perhaps worth reproducing. One dark night, the house of a neighbour in the village was attacked and gutted by five bandits who rode away with their booty.

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On learning what had happened, Obregón's aunt jumped hastily out of bed, seized a rifle, mounted her horse and chased the ruffians at high speed. Having come up with them after a long ride, she opened the duel by shooting one of them dead, whereupon she wounded two others, took the remaining pair prisoners and compelled them to carry the corpse of their comrade to the authorities to whom she duly delivered them up. This deed still lives in the memory of the inhabitants.

The people of Alamos differed considerably from most of their neighbours in habits and customs and modes of thought and action. Austerity in the interpretation of duty and a distinctive social and moral cachet marked them off from the neighbouring populations. Three of Obregón's sisters were for opening a school in Huatabampo but their mother at first refused her permission. Finally and reluctantly, however, she assented, the school was founded, and some sixty girls frequented it. The three school-mistresses became extremely popular, but received besides the gratitude of their neighbours barely enough salary to keep house. Bidden to all local feasts and festivals they refused every invitation, preferring work at home and the writing of verses, in which one of them attained a certain proficiency. Once a General on a visit to the village desired their company at an entertainment which he was giving and having received the usual negative reply peremptorily ordered them to attend. They again refused. He then addressed the head mistress Cenobia angrily, whereupon she resigned her post. Apologies and entreaties followed, and they all three were ultimately prevailed upon to remain.

After eight and a half years' educational service they were offered a school at Navojoa\* at the higher salary of one hundred pesos a month which they accepted. The results of their teaching there endeared them to the population for they were highly gifted pedagogues, but when after the lapse of a few years they paid a flying visit to Huatabampo, the scene of their former labours, they were so insistently entreated by this village to stay on and take charge once more of the education of the girls that they complied with the request. A subsequent offer of one hundred and fifty pesos monthly made by a landlord in Navojoa who was solicitous for the success of

\* Near Culiacan in the State of Sinaloa.



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the local school was refused on the ground of the obligations they had already contracted.

As Alvaro's mother—a woman of inexhaustible energy, resourcefulness and selflessness—was unable to provide for and educate her youngest offspring, he was confined to the care of these three sisters, one of whom took especial charge of his moral upbringing and discharged her task with scrupulous care. She laid uncommon stress upon veracity as the groundwork of all morality and punished severely every deviation from truth, every act or word denoting a lack of sincerity or candour. It is hardly too much to say that the moral side of Alvaro's education was puritanical in its austerity, if compared with that which most of the youth of his country received, and in this respect no less than in virtue of his inborn qualities, he differs to a noteworthy extent from the bulk of his compatriots. Between the people of Sonora generally, however, and those of the central and southern States there is a marked contrast of temperament and character. To the blend of the Yaqui Indian and the Spaniard on the one hand and to the influence steadily growing in intensity of the people of the United States on the other, this divergence is probably due. It is at any rate notorious that quickness of apprehension, ready resourcefulness, independence, irrepressible energy and a frank address which sometimes makes little of form and often merges in bluntness, are among the traits that mark the Sonorans in general and the people of Alamos, Huatabampo, Culiacan and Navojoa in especial. In Obregón's case one may perhaps add the Hibernian strain and the successful struggle with poverty to the many factors that have made him what he is.

Although all his teachers were Catholics, dogmatic religion had little or no place in his early training—it certainly made no impress on his memory and never formed the basis of his morality. Like his contemporaries he received first communion and afterwards confirmation with the solemnity customary in Catholic countries, but he has never been a devout practising Catholic. None the less he continued in after life to tread the path of duty traced for him by his sisters, one of whom is a fine practical psychologist and shrewd observer of men and things. Many years later this lady was pitted for a few hours in a conversational duel against the most

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ingenious special pleader in the Republic. This man who has little sympathy for her favourite brother was defending his own line of action, appealing for indulgence and urging that antipathy to himself could only be the result of ignorance. "I should like you," he explained, "to read what I wrote on such and such occasions, for I know that you would then see how I have been misjudged." "There are some men," the lady answered, "who must be judged not by what they have said but by what they have left unsaid. And if you will allow me to be quite frank, I have always included you in the number."

From the discipline and tuition of his sisters, Alvaro passed into the public school of Huatabampo the head, and indeed only master of which was his own brother Don José, whom I have several times met. Huatabampo in those days was a village consisting of the frailest of human habitations built of *adobe*\* and dwelt in by the poorest of hard-working people, some seven hundred all told, who had to exert themselves very strenuously to keep body and soul together, and were sternly wrestling with destiny almost from the cradle to the grave. None of the inhabitants enjoyed anything like a competency except three, including a decayed General. One of Obregón's comrades was Jesus Abitia, an undeveloped genius who lived with his father and eight brothers and sisters on less than two shillings a day. Necessaries of life, however, were relatively cheap, a hen costing less than twopence, a litre of milk—which was plentiful and excellent—a halfpenny, and other provisions in proportion.

In those days Porfirio Diaz was Dictator of the Republic and although he is fairly charged with having neglected the education of the people, he had inaugurated his tenure of office by opening a number of schools. School attendance at Huatabampo was obligatory as in other parts of the country, but there at least the law was observed and every boy—there were twenty-five in all including a few Indians—went regularly and most of them toiled hard out of school to help to eke out by their labour the slender earnings of their parents.

Pocket money for the children was practically unknown. The Abitia family had barely resources enough to keep the breath of life in their bodies. Their food was of the scantiest

\* Unburned brick dried in the sun.

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and the simplest. There was no cash available for boots, hats or socks and the little ones who coveted such luxuries were constrained to earn the price of them. It is interesting to note the various expedients to which these unspoiled children, their faculties whetted by hunger, cold and heat, had recourse. Abitia, for example, manufactured the pieces for a tombola or lottery, cut and fashioned the wood, making his own colours and painting the figures on them, and having worked at this for six months, disposed of his masterpiece—which is still in existence—for twenty pesos. This precocious artificer, now a friend of mine, was then seven years old! He also made brass rings graven with the image of a heart, burnished and sold them to Indian girls for twenty centavos each. Later on he formed a village orchestra consisting of his brothers, constructed the musical instruments for their use—flutes, guitars and violins—and gave concerts, for admission to which a charge of about one farthing was paid. Without any technical instruction he made a number of violins and sold them at a profit. Having on his father's death a large family of brothers and sisters to support, he painted doors, gates, panels, became barber and carpenter and photographer to the village, and musician at weddings and funerals. He was a mechanical genius.

Obregón's expedients were of a different kind. Without apprenticeship of any kind he became a carpenter, making doors, boxes, chairs and tables, all of which he sold.

The schoolmaster, Don José, was beloved by all the children. I have since come to know personally many of Obregón's schoolfellows, and they all paid the highest tribute of praise to Obregón the teacher as well as to Obregón the pupil. Most of them still live on in the scenes of their childhood, earning little, coveting nothing and regarding their former fellow scholar, now President of the Republic, with the same friendly feelings as of old. It is not often that a prophet has such honour in his own country.

The little rustic school at Huatabampo was quite a remarkable institution in its way. I feel tempted to liken it to a rural Balliol College with a rural Jowett as the chief pedagogue. It certainly left a deep impress on the minds of all who were subjected to its discipline, especially on Alvaro Obregón. The children were taught to observe, compare and criticize.

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Upon veracity, independent judgment and distrust of authority in matters of opinion the greatest stress was laid. The lives of the scholars as well as of their parents and masters were permeated by an overpowering sense of realities which left no scope for the dreaming of dreams. To some extent this was perhaps a loss on the emotional side. But it fell in with the needs of the children, and so popular was the teacher, and so interesting were the lessons that the boys often entered the schoolroom at half-past seven in the morning instead of the official hour of eight. There were no truants. Among the precocious little toilers who came thus regularly to be initiated into the mysteries of life there was no trace of anything like unreasoning belief in the perfection of the present scheme of things. One and all they were encountering the sharpness and the relentlessness of the struggle for existence and inquiring into its causes. Rather a spirit of sharp criticism was evoked by experience and fostered by the master, a spirit which appears to have shaped Obregón's thoughts and inspired his action ever since. The scholars were taught to scrutinize the origin and aims of institutions, to gauge their value by their actual achievements and present usefulness, and were told that all progress worthy of the name has its source in love of social justice and respect for individual freedom.

From Don José, who was a rank agnostic, the pupils had little chance of imbibing the milk of Christian doctrine. There was no church in the hamlet, and the curate of Culiacan—where the parish church was situate—contented himself with paying an occasional visit to the place in order to perform the ceremony of marriage and to christen the new-born children. The most devoted Catholics in the place were the Indians, some of whose religious customs evoked criticism and irreverence.

In the opinion of his pupils Don José was a zealous, well informed and successful pedagogue who possessed the rare arts of communicating what he knew and of arousing as well as satisfying curiosity about the practical problems of life. He also contrived to keep his wards well posted on the current events of the world, and they informed me that they used to know by heart the names and exploits of most of the public men of the world, including the generals in the war then being waged between China and Japan. In a word, they already felt themselves units of the community of mankind of which

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they were taught to regard themselves as active and responsible members.

"This doctrine," General Obregón said to me, "I have never allowed to lie fallow. The ever-present consciousness of the unity of the race is the only sound basis of a national policy worthy of a cultural people or of one which aspires to culture. The neglect of this truth is the source of most of the sinister errors into which contemporary statesmen have fallen. And before their blunders can be corrected, the narrow ideas underlying them must be abandoned. True, a nation, like an individual, has its own special interests, and is warranted in furthering them to the best of its ability and opportunities, but only within legitimate limits. The form of national egotism which takes no account of the just demands of other peoples is a crime against that larger community, which it is the aim and object of all progress to organize as compactly as may be. It is in this direction that the stream of human tendency, deliberate and unconscious, is continually flowing. We are too apt to dwell upon the individual and the nation, and to promote the interests of these as the worthiest object of our pursuit, whereas real progress lies in the development of the final aims of the species—one of which I take to be the organization of a world community knitted together by lofty yet feasible purpose and founded upon morality, of which justice is an integral function."

The axiom on which this theory is founded is implicitly challenged by many to-day, but the benefits it is capable of conferring as a canon of public action should not be overlooked. At all events I mention the subject merely as an indication of the kind of teaching Obregón received at Huatabampo, of the train of thought which it started and of the fruits which it may reasonably be expected to produce.

Thoroughly moral in essentials—which, however, must not be taken to include that stringency of view respecting relations between the sexes which prevails among most peoples of English speech, and is universally recognized as one of their ethical doctrines—Obregón never belonged to any church, nor has he ever accepted any dogma, excepting this, that there is none which has established an indisputable claim to credence. Against churchmen who employ their spiritual authority for political purposes, if their politics run counter to his own broad

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ideas, his hostility is open and bitter, and during the civil war he displayed it unstintingly in the capital and other places, as he himself admits. Towards clerics who hold aloof from public affairs he is tolerant but unsympathetic.

I have never heard him say a harsh word of any minister of religion, and little though he sympathizes with the class, he is a sincere advocate of absolute liberty of worship to be accorded to all denominations impartially. I doubt, however, that he has as yet made an exhaustive study of the extent to which that liberty has been systematically, and I think unwisely, curtailed to the detriment of the principal church in the Republic. His attitude generally on the subject of religion seems to lack that serenity of thought which marks most of his policies. In spite of the persecution of churches by States, and of the antagonism of science, religion has ever played a potent part in the evolutionary progress of peoples and individuals, and it would be rash to hazard the opinion that its influence in human development is spent. Religious phenomena are strikingly persistent and are sometimes decisive as factors of social life, and to ignore them is to lose sight of an element to be reckoned with in many social problems, while to seek to suppress them would be suicidal.

Obregón's ethics are as simple as is his view of the religious side of life. He holds that a developed sense of moral obligation is the only durable cement of civilized society, and he further maintains that by the degree of its comprehensiveness one can measure the progress of a nation and of the human race. "Excess is, to my thinking, the only vice," he often repeats, "and it is a vice even when it is the exaggeration of a virtue." Hence he naturally leaves a somewhat large margin for things morally indifferent—larger than is usual in English-speaking countries—and his tolerance of certain weaknesses of his fellows endears him to many. But to dishonesty and deception he gives no quarter. Veracity, plain dealing, respect for one's word and integrity in the fullest sense of the term are among the virtues which he practises and preaches, and the lack of which denotes, in his judgment, an inferior category of men. He professes to regard those qualities as the alpha and omega of a cultured community, without which no constitution, however clearly drawn up, can create an organic entity worthy to figure among the progressive peoples of the earth. In all

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stages of his own varied career as mechanic, agricultural labourer, factory hand, military leader and head of a revolutionary movement, zeal for social aims, thirst for social and political justice—at first vague and sporadic, afterwards definite and continuous—were the mainspring of such of his activities as were not devoted to the struggle for existence.

Although Obregón's leanings are decidedly towards what is currently known as agnosticism he has not escaped the tendency so marked in self-made men to transform the attitude of suspended judgment into a dogma of positive denial, and to pin his faith to that. In his rationalism there is no room for any of those substitutes for a religious system which some men find in philosophy and others in the search for a nexus between the visible and the unseen. In a word, he is not religious by temperament any more than by early training. It is fair, however, to add, on the other hand, that wholly free from a spirit of proselytism, he is content to let his neighbours work out their salvation in their own way, and among his warmest political partisans are pious, practising Catholics—bishops and archbishops as well as laymen—who admire in him the statesman who is prepared to do away with lawlessness and bloodshed and to substitute justice and morality for the insincerity and corruption of latter-day politics.

All the schoolchildren of Huatabampo, besides their own voluntary labours, performed menial and other work at home for their parents. But none of them toiled as hard or began as young as Alvaro Obregón. At the early age of five he was already making himself useful to his family, and by the time he was seven he was entrusted with much of the household work, including the purchase of provisions. When less than thirteen he obtained the use of a patch of land for himself on which he planted tobacco, cultivating it with the utmost care whenever he could steal a few minutes from his other avocations. The little crop he harvested, dried, prepared, cut, and made into cigarettes, to which he gave the name "America." But as the quality was not of the highest the demand was very slack and the venture threatened to be a failure, whereupon one of his mates went to the shops in the place, as if sent by his elders, to purchase the brand "America." None of the salesmen had the cigarettes in stock, but aroused by these inquiries they promptly invested in a certain number, and

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young Obregón got some slight return for his ingenuity and labour. He actually registered his tobacco factory under the law, got his brother to work for him, and paid him in smokes.

The tobacco factory being situated at a distance from his home, young Alvaro had a long walk to it across the fringe of a forest infested by Mexican wolves (coyotes), and over a river which he often had to swim. Rabies was prevalent there in those times, as it is to-day, and the coyotes contributed to spread it. One day, as he was wending homewards, he came upon a clearing where an Indian had been cutting wood all day. Suddenly he heard a voice shouting out in terror: "Beware, beware! A mad wolf!" and, looking up, he beheld the Indian, pale and trembling, sitting on a branch of a tree. Before he had time to climb or run, the wolf was upon him, making a spring for his face. Obregón ducked, the wolf went over him, and then turned again to renew the attack. The lad flew to the forest fringe, seized a stick and, with the strength of desperation, belaboured the animal until it fell dead at his feet. Then the Indian slid down the tree and he and Alvaro wept tears of joy.

Coyotes were much to the fore in Sonora, and Alvaro in his childhood came in perilous contact with them from time to time. On one occasion, however, they made him ridiculous, when he was only six years old. One summer's night a report spread that a mad wolf which had bitten many persons was scudding towards the house of the Obregóns in full career. Everybody went to bed for safety except Alvaro, who, pleading the heat and his absence of fear, decided to spend the night in front of the house, where he soon dropped off asleep. A few hours later he was rudely awakened by the closing of two jaws on one of his feet. Shutting his eyes in anguish and terror he shouted at the top of his voice: "The mad wolf has bitten me!" Just then his sister Marie, who must have been on the watch all the time, rushed out, armed with a piece of wood, and found Alvaro still screaming and being dragged along the ground by an ass which was tugging at the white sheet in which the child had enwrapped himself. Alvaro was soon released and heartily laughed at.

It is worthy of note that the iron of poverty, to the pressure of which Alvaro was continuously subjected for the first twenty years of his existence, left no abiding mark either on his character or on his life-philosophy. To him it was a stimulus to



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exertion, not a debasement. One could live on very little in Huatabampo thirty-five years ago, especially if one were a native of the place. His brother, the schoolmaster, received a salary of twenty pesos a month,\* and was contented with his lot until opportunity offered to better it. But once in a while Alvaro was in sore straits and required an extraordinary effort to keep himself at the level of his schoolmates, many of whom were slightly better off than he. Thus, at the annual examinations, which were conducted with a certain degree of ceremony, it was deemed the correct thing to appear in a hat. But young Alvaro, who had been living contentedly without headgear, could not raise the money to purchase any. On the eve of the great day he was sorely perplexed, but after sundown he had a plan ready. He borrowed a machine, dispensed with sleep, obtained a quantity of rice straw, plaited it, took it down to the river and soaked it, returned and made a tolerably good hat which took everybody by surprise next morning.

At the age of ten he was working as a mechanic, without, however, abandoning school, and those who were his schoolmates then assert that he acquired considerable proficiency in the work. This was natural enough; for not only was he gifted with unusual acumen and healthy curiosity, but he possessed—and still possesses—the most prodigious memory of any human being I have ever met. I called out to him once only the names of forty cards in the pack in a certain order, and also the names of forty concrete objects, such as milk, boots, chocolates, mountain, etc., and not only did he repeat them in that order, but when I gave him the number he named the card or object—and this not only at once, but ten days later. I tested him in other ways, and I can truly affirm that I have never met a person gifted with such a receptive, retentive and responsive memory. He will encounter by chance a friend whom he has not seen for ten or fifteen years, and he can at once continue the conversation which they broke off at that remote date. He still speaks with a certain degree of fluency the Yaqui and also the Mayo language—which is a dialect of the Yaqui—which he acquired as a boy. I have heard him talk them on several occasions. But, unhappily, it is the only foreign tongue he has ever tried to master.

At the age of thirteen his school years came to an end with

\* About ten dollars in United States currency.

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an incident which impressed him somewhat at the time, and was regarded by his political friends in later life as an indication that Providence or destiny had some special work in store for him.

Although only a boy of thirteen, he had long desired to seek his fortune in the world and had made various inquiries about an opening, but without result. One day, however, he received, to his joy, a letter from a friend in Durango, who was making his own way there successfully, offering him employment of a congenial kind and scope for enterprise. Accordingly he scraped together a few pesos and took a ticket from the little port of Medano Blanco in Sonora to Mazatlan on board a steamer called *Porfirio*. On his way to Medano Blanco, however, he received a telegram informing him that the boat would not touch that port, whereupon he returned home disappointed. Hardly was he back when another message reached him to the effect that the *Porfirio* was on its way to the little port, but that he must make haste if he intended to travel by her. He again took leave of his friends, including a little sweetheart to whom he was already engaged, set out with great expedition and rode off as rapidly as the state of the roads permitted. But, to his intense regret, the vessel had already gone. At this he was disappointed, but nowise cast down. Obregón has never allowed himself to be disheartened by the pranks played him by circumstance: his temperament, decidedly sanguine and buoyant, is marked by unusual resiliency. Only once did he entirely lose hope for a brief moment under the crushing weight of a sequence of disasters which will be mentioned later on, and then, too, he was saved from death in a way that seemed extraordinary. But to conclude this story: a few days after his return from Medano Blanco he learned that the *Porfirio*, which he had twice missed, had been caught in a heavy storm and lost, together with every soul on board.

After that Obregón decided to take employment wherever he could find it, and soon he had an offer to work as a mechanic in a *hacienda* in Sonora. It was here, at a later date, that he had a curious experience which to minds more akin than his to the metaphysical temperament might have served as a point of departure for speculation of a mystical order, but in his case led merely to a note of interrogation mentally addressed to scientists. It turned upon the death of his mother, who

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was worshipped by her numerous children, not only for the generosity with which she was wont to sacrifice herself for their good, but also for the sweetness and firmness with which she faced her trials and hid them from those whom they would have grieved and might have dispirited. Towards Alvaro in particular she displayed a warmth of affection which he still loves to recall. It was to him, when he was nineteen years old and still penniless, that she confided the care of his sisters, for she had a presentiment, or rather a firm conviction, that he would one day rise to a high position in the social scale.

Well, he and his brother were employed on a *hacienda* far from the town where Señora Obregón dwelt, working twelve hours daily, earning a mere pittance and improving their minds in their leisure hours at night by reading aloud to each other. Unfortunately, the only books available, those of the landed proprietor, were almost exclusively novels, and mostly poor ones. One night, after Alvaro had gone to sleep, his brother woke him up and said :

“I have terrible news for you. Mother is dead.”

“Whatever do you mean?” rejoined Alvaro. “Have you been dreaming?”

“No, nor sleeping either. Wide awake I have just seen her as I now see you. She lay on the bed a corpse, rigid and bloodless, her face drawn and her skin like parchment. I have actually seen her.”

Alvaro argued against the possibility of such an apparition, set it down to an hallucination, and after a time induced his brother to go back to bed.

Shortly afterwards, however, another knock was heard at the door, and the brother returned with an account of a second apparition and protesting that he could not sleep. “Well,” rejoined Alvaro, “I have to be up betimes in the morning and at my work, so I cannot afford to do without sleep in order to keep you company. You are ill.”

He then woke up the housekeeper and asked for some medicine to calm his brother’s nerves, and, having obtained it, he went to bed, slept soundly, and arose next morning as usual. Two days passed after that, during which he forgot the incident completely. But in the night of the second day he heard the clatter of horses’ hoofs afar off and suddenly the episode revived in his memory. Gradually the sound grew louder, and then

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stopped. He now felt certain that it bore a direct relation to himself and his mother. The horseman dismounted and entered the house. He was a messenger with the tidings of the death of Señora Obregón, who had expired at the moment of the first apparition. . . .

The proprietor of the *hacienda* under whom Obregón now served, and, indeed, most of those who were his employers during this period of storm and stress, were kind-hearted men who took an interest of a sort in the well-being of their workmen. But, being purely superficial and temporary, it led to nothing. Only the very strong and enterprising could hope to rise in time to a position of bare economic independence, and to attain even to this they had to put forth superhuman efforts. Obregón's noviciate was long and wearisome, nor was it ended in the *hacienda*.

Eager for larger scope for his energies, at the age of nearly twenty he left the State of Sonora and went to Navolato in Sinaloa in the hope of finding congenial occupation through relatives who were resident there. They could not well refuse help to a kinsman, but, being in no mood to spoil him, they found mechanical work for him in a sugar refinery, and instructed the foreman to put Alvaro to the hardest and most difficult tasks, such as the lugging and lifting of heavy burdens. His assiduity and thoroughness, however, moved the foreman to disregard these instructions and appoint him first to be night overseer and then to superintend tasks that needed intelligence and initiative. He soon rose in the esteem of all, won the affection of his kinsmen, and when a ball was given to the "quality" of the place and Alvaro was not invited, being a "mere mechanic," his relations refused to accept until the omission was rectified.\*

At last Obregón resolved to abandon work for others and to set up for himself, and he chose husbandry as the most promising occupation. By this time his moral credit stood so high with his fellow citizens that he experienced no difficulty in obtaining a series of small loans from a number of them, his word being their guarantee for repayment. He next rented a plot of land, called together a number of labourers who were receiving the

\* Years afterwards, when commanding the troops in Sinaloa, he and his staff visited the workshop in Navolato and examined the lathe at which he was wont to work.

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market price of labour, sixty centavos\* a day, and said to them : " I want you to work for me. You are now paid by the week. I have no money to pay you weekly, but I am willing to pay you at the rate of one peso daily instead of sixty centavos. I promise to give you your wage as soon as you earn it." To this the workmen readily agreed, left their employers, and entered Obregón's service, where their expectations were fully realized.

But the landlords were wroth at the interloper who thus dared to spoil the labour market, and, life being cheap in those parts, one of them suborned a ruffian to kill Obregón and thus restore its " equilibrium." Alvaro's brother luckily got wind of the plot, sought out the suborner and calmly said :

" It is quite easy to assassinate my brother Alvaro. But it is not a whit more difficult to kill you. And if you have him made away with I myself will make an end of you."

Those words deterred the conspirators, restored outward peace and saved Alvaro's life. In the meanwhile Obregón toiled on with might and main, ploughing, digging, sowing, constructing dykes and looking forward to the harvest for his reward. I have seen photographs representing him in the midst of his fellow labourers digging a canal for irrigation. But shortly before harvest time one of those inundations which once in a while annihilate the labour of months and shatter the hopes which they warranted, swept over the cornfields, destroyed the crops, and left Obregón much worse off than before.

But he never lost his placidity of mind. Calling together his creditors he addressed them thus :

" I have kept my word with you, but Nature has not come up to our expectations. I am sorry I cannot, therefore, refund your loan this year, nor even next year, unless you lend me more money. It is for you to say whether I shall become a bankrupt or a solvent debtor." All except one of the creditors decided to advance him a fresh loan, and within a shorter period than they expected they were repaid every penny of the capital and interest. Little by little after this mishap Obregón prospered on the land, treated his labourers as his equals, and lived in almost every respect as one of themselves. He also accepted contracts for work which he executed satisfactorily, and at last

\* One hundred centavos are a peso, which is equal to half a United States dollar.

## Early Days

he became the owner of a very modest little manor house bearing the significant name of "Ruined Cottage."\*

At the age of twenty-three he had already wedded his first wife, by whom he afterwards had two children, who are still living. In connection with this marriage an incident occurred which brings into sharp relief his settled attitude towards the Church, of which he is a nominal member, and also his detestation of anything that resembles insincerity. His bride, like most Mexican brides, insisted on being married in the Catholic Church, and Obregón called on the clergyman who was to perform the ceremony in order to make the requisite arrangements.

"You will have to go to confession," exclaimed the priest, "before receiving the sacrament of matrimony."

"But I don't believe in confession," Obregón rejoined, "and surely you would not have me play at make-believe."

"Well, in that case you have the alternative—you can pay the marriage fee which exempts those who do not comply with the religious requirements."

"I wish I could, but I am unable to afford the money."

"Very well, then you must confess and the ceremony will cost you nothing."

Obregón, intent on marriage, had no choice. He went to confession, but when asked what sins he had committed, replied: "None. I have done nothing in malice, I have no reason to repent of any of my deliberate acts, and I am sorry that you are put to the trouble of hearing me tell you so." That brief conversation exhausted the matter. The priest insisted no further, and the wedding took place in due course without any fees.†

A fairly safe test of a man's integrity and general moral worth is the degree of consideration he enjoys amongst those in whose midst he has grown up and made his way in the world. And, judged by this standard, I may say that few Mexicans enjoyed or enjoy as high a reputation as that which Obregón

\* Quinta Chilla.

† This narrative, which was given to me by General Obregón himself, and also by others, called forth angry and irrelevant comments among Catholics in the United States, some of whom declared that no priest ever demands a fee for confession. Their statement is quite true. Obregón was never asked to pay a fee for confession, nor even for the solemnization of marriage, if he first confessed. The fee demanded was only for the latter ceremony and was insisted on only if the bridegroom refused to comply with his duty as a Catholic by first obtaining absolution for his sins. I have narrated the incident exactly as I heard it from the President himself.

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firmly established amongst his own shrewd, observant neighbours. His word among them is a bond; between promise and achievement there is only the interval defined in advance by himself, and he can fairly accept as a just guerdon the tribute of high praise which the entire community among which he spent his early life bestows upon him unstintingly. One of the many manifestations of this public confidence—which was also his first initiation into public life—was his election to the post of President of the Municipality of Huatabampo under the federal government of Francisco Madero. It also coincided with the beginning of the period of civil wars which well-nigh ruined the Republic, turned Obregón's name into a clarion for men of order and law, and finally raised him to the Presidency.

## CHAPTER V

### MEXICO IN THE TROUGH OF THE SEA

WHEN Alvaro Obregón forsook the ease and comforts of a happy home in Sonora to devote himself to the service of his country, he was yielding to an impulse which had nought in common with personal ambition. This fateful step was taken in response to the call of duty and to a set of ethical considerations for which his contemporaries had little understanding. In this respect early education had moved him out of the groove of his time and environment.

Mexico was then on the verge of irreparable ruin. One of the fairest and potentially richest countries on the globe, capable of sustaining two hundred million inhabitants, it counted less than sixteen, and these were deploying their energies in tearing each other to pieces. The people, gifted by nature and industrious by training, had been held down for centuries in spiritual and intellectual darkness, and were treated as fair quarry by unscrupulous upstarts and ferocious brigands. Within the sixty years that had elapsed since its independence, over a hundred revolutions and revolts had devastated the land and decimated the people. Every swashbuckler who called himself General and every aspiring politician who coveted wealth and power posed as the deliverer of the nation, which, as soon as he reached the goal of his ambition, had to be delivered from its deliverers. Each one promised more in an hour than could be accomplished in a generation.

The curse of Mexico, as of Spain, had been its lack of cohesion, which is the result of many causes. Want of communications is one of these. Intercourse among the various elements of the population is consequently so arduous as to be often impossible, and the results are isolation, a narrow horizon and local patriotism. One of Mexico's chronic problems, therefore,



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from the earliest ages, has been the unification of her many peoples, and among the most formidable hindrances to its realization are the peculiar topographical and climatic conditions of the country. Insuperable of yore, when the inhabitants lacked metallic tools and beasts of burden, they are still overwhelming in various places.

Altitude, more even than geographical situation, is the key to most of those difficulties. High, oftentimes impassable, mountain ranges hem in valleys and tablelands of great extent, baffling all attempts on the part of the inhabitants at intercommunication ; hence, even in this era of steam and electricity, superabundance of foodstuffs in one place is seldom of any avail to the famine-stricken dwellers in neighbouring regions. Before the Spanish conquest, such embryonic trade as was carried on depended upon human carriers, who have since been reinforced, but never wholly substituted, by pack-animals, railway trains and steamers. There are still districts, in spite of successful revolution and democratic progress, where an abstemious vegetarian race of Indians discharge the functions of mules, transporting heavy and valuable cargoes on their backs at an amazingly swift pace over vast distances and for nominal remuneration.

Roads and bridges, such as the untutored country people in all parts of the world are wont to construct as makeshifts, are of less utility in Mexico than elsewhere because of the destructive torrential rains and various vagaries of Nature there. Many important but undeveloped industrial centres lack bridges and roads, and even if these existed their maintenance would constitute an arduous problem and a heavy financial burden. Irrigation dams would partially solve one of the difficulties, but they presuppose a set of conditions which are only now about to be realized. Until recently the mule paths, trails, and even the highways, were infested with brigands who imparted to the transport industry a distinct flavour of hazard and danger, and, to make matters worse, as recently as a quarter of a century back there was in Mexico, as in pre-revolutionary France, a tax\* on almost every description of goods and foodstuffs passing from State to State. In many places barter still held the field against money transactions, and as a consequence

\* Known as the Alcabala. It existed down to the year 1896.

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labour was more of a permanent relationship—moral or immoral—between the employers and the workmen than a free contract, while political liberty was for the same reason not only unknown but impracticable.

The spread of money, the creation of banks, the construction of railways and the organization of labour, as well as revolutionary upheavals, have done away with that set of conditions. But, in spite of all these, many and curious traces of the old order of things have survived into the new era, supplying the tourist with an interesting spectacle and confronting the reformer with an embarrassing task. For example, observant Mexicans who have travelled through their native land are surprised to find sequestered spots here and there in which the uses of money are scarcely understood and barter still flourishes.

It is not easy for the foreigner who has never visited the Republic to realize how remote province is from province, how slow are communications of various kinds between district and district and city and city, how scant is the interest which the average inhabitant feels in the affairs of the community, and how real in the case of this or that territory is the peril of atrophy. Yucatan, for instance, is cut off from most other States of the Union, and in particular from the political centre, to a degree calculated to astonish even Mexicans. It might be likened to a branch at the extremity of a tree, half strangled by pressure, deprived of sufficient sap and slowly drying up. When travelling over the Peninsula in company with General Obregón, I learned that letters took from four to five weeks and in many instances two months or more, to reach the Yucatecans from Mexico City, whereas a good American, British or German steamer and train would accomplish the journey in from thirty to forty hours. For a Yucatecan to pay a visit to the Mexican capital was to undertake a wearisome journey, the duration of which was uncertain and the cost incalculable in advance. Hence, instead of confronting the hardships of such a trip, most Yucatecans who had the means, the leisure and the choice, preferred to visit the United States and also to send their children to school there. It is needless to point out how utterly abnormal and politically unsafe such a condition of things was. It has, however, since been bettered by President Obregón.

During my visit to the State of Chiapas, in the year 1920;

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there was abundance of corn to be had for sale, and the neighbouring States, which were sorely in want of it, gave the necessary orders for large consignments. But communications were so defective that it could not be delivered. I saw long caravans of mules struggling painfully with their burdens on muddy paths on which they were constantly falling. Finally, the orders were cancelled and the requisite supplies sent from the United States.

Difficulty of access rather than any lack of communications keeps the important State of Sonora in some essential respects so detached from the centre that federal troops, if needed there, could not reach the scene of action in adequate numbers within a reasonable time unless they passed *viâ* the United States. In the bloodless revolution of May, 1920, which culminated in the downfall of the Carranza regime, it was the attitude of Sonora, which is in the favourable position of being able to attack without being liable to speedy invasion, that first turned the scale in favour of General Obregón.

These conditions help to explain the absence of solidarity among the people, each class and section of which was wont to think and act independently. A spirit of rank selfishness and rebellion has, therefore, been one of the characteristic traits of a small but active section of each of the States, which constantly kept stirring up trouble. The main defect, however, visible everywhere, was the want of a collective ideal, of a lofty aspiration common to all. And the civic strife of States, the insubordination of Generals, the outbreak of local revolts, were the outcome of this want of a spiritual denominator.

Individuals devoid of moral sense, seeing no other avenue open to competency, power or natural development, took to the profession of arms in a spirit akin to that of the Italian *condottieri* of the Middle Age. This became the most lucrative of all callings and the freest. Hence the ever-swelling number of its recruits. The talk of the various chiefs to the people was invariably soft and soothing: with words they would spread a shakedown of roses, while their deeds took the forms of fire and sword. The early Mexican revolutions had at least removed certain great evils and substituted others, but most of the later upheavals were the work of ravenous free-booters and politicians, who pursued a multitude of sordid

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objects, by criminal means and under cover of conflicting principles.

The history of Mexico falls into two chapters, one of which begins with the Spanish Conquest and ends with the separation from Spain, while the other comprises the national annals since the independent country has had to rely upon its own resources. To Obregón, whose vision is clearer than that of his contemporaries, the former period may have suggested the bondage of the Hebrews under the Pharaohs, while the latter may have mirrored itself as a large edition of the story of Cain and Abel. The Spaniards had unfitted the peoples of Mexico for self-government, prevented the various ethnic elements from coalescing into a nation or a community, and left a loose agglomeration of tribes, tongues and conflicting interests. The only cement which lent a semblance of unity to these disparate fragments was the Catholic Church, which possibly may have saved the indigenous races from the extermination that had overtaken the aborigines of North America, and certainly kept them in a state of pupillage, ignorance and sluggishness. For in both stages of Mexico's existence the foreigners, first the Spaniard, and then the Anglo-Saxon, ruthlessly exploited the population in the name of religion, and the latter awakened in the hearts of the natives an intense loathing for the malodorous combination of greed and godliness.

It is no exaggeration to say that Mexico's history down to Obregón's rise has, with the exception of a few brief periods, been a sequence of disasters brought on by native and foreign marauders; the former undisguised wolves, eager to devour the flock, and the latter wolves disguised as shepherds, impatient to do the same.

The numerous attempts of the emancipated people to govern themselves form a pathetic chapter in Mexico's annals. They remind one of the tossing and turning of a fever patient on his couch, vainly endeavouring to find a position in which to settle down to rest. The land has often been in a wild welter of chaotic confusion. Frequent political explosions, now in one city, now in another, gave rise to conflagrations which alarmed Mexico's neighbours. Ashes, wreck and ruins strewn the land. Many of the bonds which usually hold men together in communities had mouldered away during the long process of decay.

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But underneath the dust and rubbish there still glowed fire of a kind that promised light as well as heat. Side by side with ogres, and ghouls and scourges of God, men of goodwill arose who strove bravely to hitch the national wagon to a star, and not only fought tooth and nail against injustice but found followers in numbers ready to suffer and die for a good cause. The selflessness, endurance and heroism of the unnamed thousands, whose marvellous exploits under Juarez and Diaz won victory after victory over the foreign troops dispatched by Napoleon III., deserve a place in universal history among the grandiose feats of weak nations defending themselves against the strong. These were the small beginnings of a common aim. Unhappily they were mainly negative and short-lived.

The common danger once over, selfish interests became predominant anew. The motives of even the highest-minded patriots were streaked with personal ambition. "The country shall be saved but only by me," was the only maxim capable of accounting for the behaviour of public workers who had deserved well of their country, and would fain deserve better. Benito Juarez, a national hero and a constructive statesman, whose name will never be forgotten among Latin Americans, achieved great things for his country and race. Having displayed samples of the achievements of which Mexicans are capable, he might have compacted the elements of the population into a nation and changed the course of its history, had he lived long enough. But his energies had been expended in delivering the Republic from a foreign yoke, and scant time was allowed him by fate to build up a new structure on the ruins of the old one. Enough, however, is known of his grandiose plans and admirable principles to warrant profound regret that his career was so brief.

The feats of Porfirio Diaz, who began as a gallant captain and selfless patriot, shed a brilliant lustre on his people and country during the earlier stages of his splendid career. He was Juarez' right-hand man in the work of driving the foreign armies out of the country and, like him, was of obscure parentage and defective education, but endowed with great natural capacities. Diaz, when he rose to power, set himself the two-fold task of maintaining outward order in the Republic, and bringing in foreign enterprise and capital, and unfortunately

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he narrowed down his life-work to that. But the pressing need of communications appealed to him forcibly from the outset, and he bestirred himself to have a network of railways built, connecting the remotest parts of the country with each other. This he needed as a means, not of facilitating intercourse, but of quickly transporting troops whithersoever they might be required to quell a mutiny or punish an outrage. For his method of pacification was purely mechanical. All manifestations of discontent were suppressed by force or hindered by terror. Incidentally, however, the various ports of Mexico were built or repaired and thrown open to commerce. Foreign capital was invested in various useful enterprises, and Mexican credit thrived and waxed great. Owing partly to the backward condition of the native population, but mainly to the solidarity which has so often distinguished foreigners in Mexico, many of the industrial and other concerns took on the appearance of foreign monopolies of capital and of labour. Mexicans were not excluded from these industrial undertakings, but were employed chiefly in the lower and lowest tasks, and were treated as an inferior people. In their disputes with the outlander the authorities generally took the side of the latter, and suppressed every act of insubordination with a degree of ferocity which would have been criminal had it emanated from a conquering race.

Diaz, bent on gaining the confidence of the great foreign capitalists, delivered up to these not only the mines and lands for exploitation, but also the manhood of his own country, who, under the name of peons, became a sort of helot class which stood on the threshold of the human family, and almost beyond the pale of Mexican law. Millions of acres of communal lands which the natives had inherited from their forbears were taken from them by chicane, and sold for a song, the alleged purpose being colonization. Thus four foreign companies acquired thirteen million acres in Lower California, and became forthwith tenacious of their property rights, although unable to fulfil their corresponding obligations. For the strict maintenance of these rights Secretary Hughes is now evincing watchful solicitude, the United States Government being the guardian of the sacred rights of property.

Diaz, as Dictator, preferred prestige to justice, personal

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power to the common weal and the interests of foreign capitalists to those of the Mexican population. He kept himself in office by violating the Constitution, ingratiated himself with the outlanders by prodigal concessions bestowed in the form of *bona fide* contracts, and he snuffed out all tokens of discontent by summarily chastising scores of thousands of natives who had infringed no law. With the administration of justice the Dictator interfered continually. No important criminal or civil process was decided before his personal verdict had been privately laid before the members of the tribunals. And his suggestions were tantamount to commands. It is fair to add that these tribunals were not on a level with those of progressive European countries, that many of the judges were open to suasion and to more material considerations, and that Diaz' interference was generally, but not always, exercised for the purpose of upholding the right cause. Still there were other and more efficient means of attaining this end than the subjection of the law courts to the Executive.

It should also be borne in mind that by dint of the painful sacrifices mentioned above, peace and order were mechanically established at home, friendly relations cultivated with foreign governments, and Mexico's status correspondingly raised in the community of nations. But these apparent improvements were merely temporary because mechanical. They had no roots. There was no organism, and to employ a homely similitude Mexico's prestige might be compared to the cleanliness and spruceness of a sweep on Sundays. With the Government of the United States Diaz contrived to be on satisfactory terms of intercourse, seeing that he neither essayed nor pretermitted aught of importance without fixing his gaze upon Washington and taking stock of the mien with which his intentions were received by the statesmen there. Like the ancient Egyptians, who had their sobering skeleton at the feast, Diaz had ever present to his mind what he was wont to term the *fantasma* or bugbear of foreign intervention. Whenever his Cabinet hesitated to be guided by his suggestions, he invariably clenched the matter by evoking that dread spectre whereupon all objections vanished.

Enough has been said to explain why it is that, while so little is known in Europe of the really great statesman, Benito

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Juarez, the name of Porfirio Diaz has been as widely advertised as one of the popular cures for headache or liver complaint. He was a despot whose intentions were much better than his achievements ; he had some of the makings of a great leader, and might have become one if he had been wholly free from constraint. But by violating the Constitution of his country, and by navigating the Ship of State into foreign waters, he forfeited freedom of action, and was forced to sail between Scylla and Charybdis, where he was finally lost on the rocks.

The members of Diaz' administration—many of them honest, well-meaning, polished, but short-sighted men—were gifted with too much intelligence for the task they had set themselves, and too little moral courage for that which was becoming daily more urgent. In the spirit that moved them there was naught that could be termed constructive. It was impatient of every new tendency which had rendered human society progressive. It made no effort or pretence to think, act or feel in rhythm with the pulse-beats of the contemporary world. In truth, the Government was less a viable organism than a huge mechanism for the perpetuation of the actual regime and the maintenance of such meagre social forces as were deemed innocuous and had received official recognition, to the exclusion of all others. In short, statecraft had become a process of decorous petrification.

In these circumstances the people were hardly better off than under the Spanish domination. Indeed, many sections were more miserable still, and they had no redress. But they were beginning to feel the hardship of their lot, and to resent it. Those who openly showed signs of disaffection and many who were only neighbours of the discontented were promptly silenced, sometimes executed, and more often condemned to hard labour, in what was then considered to be the deadliest climate in the Republic. Root-reaching reform from above was excluded from the programme of the oligarchs, the slender base of whose scheme of government was the maintenance of Mexico's credit abroad and of surface tranquillity at home. Those had indeed been the principal needs of the country for a brief while, but that epoch had gone by, pressing forward other problems of a more urgent character. The relations between master and servant, between the Government and



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the governed, and between the heterogeneous ethnic elements of the population had never been visualized as practical questions, but rather as skeletons in the cupboard, to be hidden out of sight. Thus time, with its alternations of life and death, its silent burial of cherished hopes and the emergence of new aspirations, was passing by the peoples of Mexico, bringing them no new birth. The dictatorship had indeed become an oligarchy, but increase of masters produced no surcease of misery among the population; and it was left to the partisans of the regime who had crushed out all legal opposition to sap the foundations of the fabric which they themselves had so laboriously built up. This, however, they duly accomplished.

A gifted North American observer published his impressions of these conditions as follows: "There is not a Spanish-American State which has proved its capacity for self-government as yet. It is a fair question whether any one of them would have been worse off than it is to-day if Spanish rule had been maintained in it. The chief exception is Mexico, but Mexico has been for ten or fifteen years under a dictator, and the republican forms have been in abeyance. What will happen there when the Dictator dies nobody knows."

Vague discontent was rife among the masses and concentrated hatred among the few intellectuals and politicians, whose impulsive temperament, wild idealism and recklessness constituted the most formidable danger that confronted the ruling classes. Francisco Madero became the incarnation of these manifestations and the mouthpiece of the disaffected, after having risked his life in an attempt to focus, control and direct the rebellious elements in the country. He fell into the clutches of the authorities but escaped to the frontier, after which he made himself the centre of a nucleus of resolute men, who took up arms against the dictator and the regime, and headed the revolution which culminated in the overthrow of the Government.

From that movement Obregón, who, like many other intelligent Mexicans, evinced a sympathetic interest in its success, held almost entirely aloof. He wished it well, admired its champions and advocated its principles, but shrank from going further. He was reluctant to fight for it. For one thing he loathed war. But that was not all. By this time

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he possessed some land, on which he was successfully cultivating chick-peas, a house in which he lived with his two children and their aunts, his first wife having died some time before, and he was bending all his energies to the maintenance of his sisters and the rearing of his offspring. For the first time in his life he was free from economic cares, and within sight of a competency. Was he now to sacrifice these results of years of exertions and expose his sisters and his little ones to the grip of beggary? This questioning attitude of his towards the revolution is outlined and qualified by himself with that frankness which is one of his most attractive qualities, as follows :

"The Maderist, or anti-re-electionist party was split into two sections: One composed of individuals responsive to the call of duty, who left their homes and severed every tie of family and of interest to shoulder a rifle, a shotgun or any other weapon they could lay their hands on; and the other of men who hearkened to the promptings of fear, who found no arms, who had children liable to become orphans if their fathers should fall in combat, and who were bound by a thousand other ties which even duty cannot suppress when the spectre of fear grips the hearts of men.

"It was to the second of these classes that I unfortunately belonged."

The sense of his obligations to the narrow circle of his family was stronger than that of duty to the wider community. But his conscience was only dormant.

The revolution against Diaz triumphed, therefore, without Obregón's active help, and this circumstance filled him with remorse. He felt guilty of gross remissness, and when two months later he was elected by his fellow citizens to the mayoralty of Huatabampo, this mark of esteem from the population in whose midst he had grown up, and who were thoroughly conversant with his qualities and defects, seemed to carry with it a rebuke to his egotism, as well as a tribute to his personal integrity.

"It did not," he writes, "reconcile me to conscience which continually whispered: 'In the work of emancipation you failed to do your duty as a citizen.'"

The State-stroke to which Diaz fell a victim opened the sluice-gates to the fire-springs of civil war, which well-nigh

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engulfed the nation. Francisco Madero, the idealist, had in the meanwhile become the recognized leader of the militant reformers. This man who soon succeeded Diaz was characterized by transparent honesty, lofty aims, invincible hesitancy and temperamental weakness. Seeing clearly, reasoning logically, and feeling humanely, he was deficient in the will to act. Or say rather that between his will and the capacity for doing there was a fatal gap which he vainly sought to fill by mystical contrivances. Hence he followed instead of leading, and after a brief span of office he was shot by the partisans of Huerta, the most unscrupulous miscreant who ever occupied the presidential chair.

Thereupon the "abomination of desolation" fell upon the land. Revolts, rebellion and, worse than these, banditry, which masked itself in the garb of a reform movement spread over the ill-starred land. Carranza, the Governor of the State of Coahuila in the North—a dull, solemn, honest and self-centred squire—withheld recognition from the usurper, and took up arms to overthrow him. Zapata, a self-made man, with a feasible but defective political programme, enlisted numerous bands of rebels under his own banner; various freebooters and highwaymen unfurled the standard of patriotism, and the entire Republic seemed like a swarm of bees deprived of their queen. The general free fight that ensued bade fair to become a reproduction on a vast scale of the battle of the Kilkenny cats.

Thereupon the adherents of the Diaz regime, and together with them many foreign capitalists, packed up their movable effects and fled the country, which was delivered up to every kind of outrage and crime. The lives and property of Mexicans were not worth a day's purchase. Enterprise was paralysed, trade stagnant and initiative discouraged. It was only in the oil-producing districts, where rebel chiefs were regularly subsidized by the foreign companies, that commerce with the outer world was still successfully maintained. As yet no real leader came to the fore. In consequence some hoped and many feared that the Government of the United States would become alive to its "moral duty" and economic interests, and play the part of uplifter. Truth compels one to confess that anarchy and confusion had reduced the country to such a desperate plight that a neighbour like the United

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States would have been amply justified in lending a helping hand to re-establish the reign of law and order, *provided that its altruistic profession represented its real motives*. For there seemed no hope of lasting reform from within. Indeed, so great was the dearth of relatively strong men that the people, in order to satisfy their natural turn for hero-worship, had to pour forth their admiration on heroes of evil.

Chief among these was one who had changed his name and called himself Francisco Villa. A genial criminal, who had been imprisoned for theft and homicide, Villa had great natural parts and no education. He was a creature of wild contradictory impulses, as devoid of feeling as the Djinghis Khan or Timur Leng of history, and at the outset more ignorant than Jack Cade. His mind was on the borderland of insanity. At times he would take a malignant pleasure in human suffering, employ torture for his amusement, and then suddenly, overcome by a wave of maudlin tenderness, would perform an act which emanating from a normal individual would be classed as magnanimous.

Villa enlisted tens of thousands in his service, devastated numerous cities, killed scores of people with his own hand and gloried in unparalleled enormities. He kept together his armies formed of the riff-raff of the country by iron discipline and the distribution of loot, obtained by violence and exaction, displayed the qualities of an intrepid and resourceful military commander, was reputed invincible in the field, and finally became the favourite of the official agents of the United States, to whose moral guidance in political matters he manifested an amiable subserviency.

As Villa, in the course of time, and in his position as the one unconquered military commander, became Obregón's principal adversary in the field and elsewhere, no biography of the latter would be complete without some account of the erratic career of the former. But the highwayman possesses another title to mention. He was a token and portent of the period, and his name the symbol under which all the delirium, the savagery, the disconcerting confusion of these troublous times were focussed and epitomized. Villa was a veritable genius of evil, and can justly claim a niche high up in the historical gallery of human monsters by the side of Heliogabalus, Nero and Caligula. General Pascual Orozco, on the other

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hand, one of the numerous vulgar trimmers to be found everywhere, owes the transient notoriety into which he suddenly rose to the circumstance that his rebellion against Madero was the occasion of Obregón's resolve to abandon his home, apprentice himself to the profession of arms, and put an end to aimless bloodshed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CALL TO ARMS

IT may seem gratuitous to assert that the prompting which at last drew Obregón from the tranquillity of his home and the joys of a pure family life in Sonora to the hardships and dangers of civil war in the sierras and deserts of the Republic was a sense of duty to his country, in which personal interest or ambition had no place. Yet this is a sober fact. But this order of motives was so far removed from the usual mainsprings of action that foreigners who judge men by appearances and labels were long unable to realize it.

For many years previously Mexican politics, as we have seen, had lacked an ideal. The Diaz Government, having made a fair start, suddenly went off at a tangent. Despite its undoubted asset of material progress—which, however, reposed upon the frailest of foundations—it was living from hand to mouth, allowing sleeping dogs to lie and muzzling or killing off those that ventured to bark. It no longer stood for any high social conception. It pursued but one ideal—that of dispensing with ideals.

Madero, who succeeded Diaz, was strong as a theorist but weak as a leader. His name survives as a symbol but the easy-going man who bore it died as a victim, and is commemorated as a martyr. His regime was marked by the disappearance of such perishable acquisitions as Diaz had laid in, including the contents of the Treasury. But he had admirers everywhere, and especially devoted followers in the northern provinces. And they kept his flag unfurled. His successful revolution, therefore, in lieu of closing an epoch, closed only a historical parenthesis, and was the recommencement of a sequence of rebellions and outbreaks which spread like a rash that connotes disease, over the entire organism.

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One of the reformers who had contributed to the overthrow of Diaz and was now itching to upset the government of Madero was a selfish, venal individual, free from convictions and eager to provoke troubles in the hope that something would turn up and benefit himself. Pascual Orozco rose in rebellion against Madero, inflicted a severe defeat on the troops dispatched against him in Chihuahua and shook the faith of many in the stability of the new order of things. Thereupon the Governor of Sonora called upon the mayors of that State to assist in the enlistment of volunteers to put down the revolt.

In this summons Obregón seemed to hear the voice of duty offering him an opportunity to make amends for past remissness and set himself right. He accordingly offered his services to the Governor, and within a fortnight had gathered round him some three hundred men, mostly friends, acquaintances and neighbours, ready to march to the inhospitable desert, where a large section of the army had just miserably perished of thirst. Obregón's troops were nicknamed the "Rich Battalion," owing to the number of relatively well-to-do young farmers like himself who composed it. He was unanimously acclaimed their chief, taking unofficial rank as lieutenant-colonel. During this first campaign, which was fought to a successful finish within less than a year, he distinguished himself so signally that his commander-in-chief, Victoriano Huerta, who was shortly afterwards to play such an unenviable part in the history of his country, exclaimed, on receiving him :

"Let us hope that this chief may become the promise of our fatherland !"

That campaign was fraught with hardships and dangers which by comparison with the life of ease and security which Obregón had enjoyed in Huatabampo were felt more intensely than those which confronted him later on when he was inured to privation and hardened to physical suffering. As a private citizen he had been an inveterate smoker of cigarettes. In the sierras there were seldom any to be had. Occasionally a soldier would smuggle in a few together with a bottle of whisky from the United States and would sell a puff for five, ten or twenty cents, receiving several dollars for the whole cigarette. The victuals too, although not exactly scarce, were far from varied, beef and flour being the staple foodstuffs on which the army lived. Obregón felt painfully at first the

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dearth of cigarettes, but adapting himself to circumstances he promptly took the resolution never to indulge in the habit of smoking them again—and he has never swerved from it since. Now and again he still enjoys a cigar, but he never feels the need of one, nor does he ever touch a cigarette.

This detail, trivial in itself, is worth recording only as a typical instance of his complete command over his appetites. It was during the same campaign that he acquired the difficult and useful habit, which he still retains, of being able to sleep at any hour of the day and practically in any posture.

When this first campaign was over Obregón returned to his home in Huatabampo, hoping to spend the rest of his days in peaceful pursuits. He arrived on the anniversary of his patron saint. In Mexico one's Saint's day is celebrated with much greater solemnity than one's birthday.

His sisters, his children and many of his neighbours had made extensive preparations to welcome him back after his long absence, but hardly had he been an hour in the house when an urgent telegram summoned him to Hermosillo, the capital of the State. Without hesitation he mounted his horse, and before reaching the capital learned that President Madero had been arrested by Victoriano Huerta, who coveted and was about to usurp the presidency, and that the achievements of the revolution were being nullified by the crimes of this usurper. Thereupon Obregón summoned his men and hurried off on a campaign which was to last for years and take him thousands of miles over sandy deserts and sultry plains, pathless sierras and pestilent marshes, exposed to hardships unknown in European warfare.

On this occasion there was no internal struggle between family obligations and duty to the larger community. Obregón's course was clear and he took it. He started off without paying even a flying visit to his family. But from Hermosillo he hurriedly scribbled a letter to his boy which is worth reproducing :

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ When you receive this letter I shall have begun my march, together with my battalion, to the northern frontier, in response to the voice of the fatherland whose very entrails are now being torn out. No good Mexican can hesitate to answer



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the call. My sole regret is that your tender age does not allow you to accompany me. If fate should reserve for me the glory of dying for this cause, bless your condition as an orphan, for with legitimate pride you can call yourself the son of a patriot. Be ever the slave of duty. Let your country, your sister and the three women who have been mothers to you form a solidarity which shall ever be sacred to you. To them you shall dedicate your life. Embrace Mary, Cenobia and Rose, and receive yourself together with my dear Quiquita, the heart of your father."

Huerta's treachery and the prospect of its consequences roused bitter resentment in the hearts of the few who were inspired by principle, and found approval and aid among the many who were actuated by self-interest. For Obregón therefore to take up arms against the man who had so recently eulogized him as the hope of his country was to enlist against a cause that relied upon a powerful backing and to breast a bloody flood which might at any moment engulf himself and his comrades.

The two figures of Madero and Huerta have often evoked sympathy or disgust among foreigners upon grounds that are at variance with historical facts; and in the United States one is frequently confronted with the opinion that Huerta was the man whom President Wilson ought to have supported. I cannot share this view. Huerta was a highly shrewd desperado possessed by ungovernable passions. It was only his untameable temper and freedom from all restraint that gave him the appearance of strength. He recognized no law, human or divine. His brain was devoid of constructive ideas and his heart of human sentiments. Had he established his régime securely he would have misruled the country with a rod of iron and demoralized the people irremediably. His policy abroad, coupled with enforced peace at home, might indeed have suited some foreign investors and domestic reactionaries, but even they had no guarantee that the dubious advantages which they looked for would be long-lived. He treated the country as his footstool and his partisans as his instruments. Freedom from the restraints of law and exemption from punishment for crime were his personal privilege and that of his friends. In an advanced state of society such an individual would be classed as a dangerous criminal and dealt with accordingly. President

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Wilson's detestation of the man was well grounded, but the acts to which it impelled the President of the United States overstepped the limits of moral support and were unjustifiable and dangerous.

Madero, on the other hand, was, as we have seen, an honest, disinterested visionary whose principal merit lay in his theories and good intentions, coupled with the circumstance that his name had become a symbol to those who yearned for social reconstruction and a new standard of political-social values. Hence the enthusiasm he called forth throughout the country. But his influence was greater at the circumference than in the centre. His head, figuratively speaking, was where his heart should have been, and was filled with sentimentality, while disembodied theories weakened his will, enforcing compliance with measures which damaged the cause he would have furthered. His murder was a dastardly crime and might well seem, in view of the usurper who profited by it, a national calamity.

Active participation in the civil war landed Obregón in a domain wholly foreign to his habits of living and modes of thought, and subjected him to a set of new and searching tests which brought the hidden lines of his character into view and revealed him as a leader of men in the widest acceptance of the term. It is a remarkable fact that from the day on which he led his raw recruits from Huatabampo to the desert of Chihuahua success crowned his every effort, until at last he came to be looked upon as the incarnate symbol of victory. Among the officers who at first fought together with him on the popular side were the "invincible" Villa, who for years never lost a battle, and professional soldiers educated abroad like Felipe Angeles, who had attained to eminence in Europe and might therefore be expected to take precedence of an uneducated farmer, inexperienced in the art of war. But some of them were pedants, others were irresolute, a few were untrustworthy and the best were excellent artillery officers and good commanders of brigades who were liable to collapse when caught in the clutches of adverse circumstance. Obregón, on the other hand, was in his element as a director of large bodies of men, whether armed or unarmed.

He rose at once to the new level, and above it. For him civil war was a terrible misfortune, and his own part in it could be justified only if it led to the moral and social regeneration of

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the community. But, keeping this object steadily before him, he sought to forge an instrument powerful enough to enable him to attain that, and was ever ready withal to seize a favourable opportunity to remove the destinies of the Republic from the arbitrament of the battlefield to the legislature and the Council Chamber of the National Palace.

Obregón, when he first launched out into a military career for the purpose of ending militarism, civil wars and dictatorships, was an utter novice. He had never studied the theory of war any more than had the Emperor Julian or Oliver Cromwell. He had not seen military service, had never even handled a rifle. In this as in other walks of life he was a self-made man. He and his faithful comrade in arms, General Eugenio Martinez, often laugh at the uncouth attempts made by the first three hundred men to play the part which they had hurriedly taken over. Most of them, like Obregón himself, did not know how to handle a rifle. Happily Martinez, who was a quiet progressive man of business, had had twelve years' experience in the army under General Diaz, and as Obregón's intimate friend he undertook to teach the volunteers the elements of drill and tactics. And within two months they were transformed into a serviceable if not perfect organism, responsive to discipline and animated by a single purpose. When this work had been accomplished, Obregón, addressing his friend, said :

"Now, Eugenio, you have set us on our feet and deserve our undying gratitude. We cannot allow you to sacrifice your business any longer. You can now return to your home." But Martinez refused, saying that he would go with Obregón whithersoever duty might call him. And from that day to this the two men have been working hand in hand. So complete is the confidence which Obregón reposes in Martinez that he has never once given him instructions, what to do or how to do it. He would merely send him to an army or a town in distress and leave him to deal with the situation according to his own judgment. And he has never had reason to regret this confidence.

Once in those early days of striving, Obregón, about to lead his recruits into their first battle, mounted a vehicle and began to instruct them as to how they should behave as soon as they got under fire. He had only delivered some half dozen sentences and was feeling encouraged by the rapt attention of the

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men, when a shell alighted beside them, exploded and hurled several of them to the ground. "Deeds now, not words," was Obregón's comment, and the soldiers rushed forward into the thick of the affray carrying all before them.

From the first Obregón set about creating an army after his own heart, and bent all his efforts to that end. New wine, he said, must be put into new bottles. He began by inculcating upon his fellow officers and their men the idea that they were fighting for justice, liberty and order, and were discharging thereby a duty to their country, their families and themselves, the consciousness of having accomplished which was to be their sole reward. He knew every officer and in the beginning every soldier personally, and he treated them all in a spirit of true comradeship. He never once struck a private or humiliated him publicly in anger; neither did he ever hesitate to punish an officer, however high his rank, for cowardice or disobedience. At the historic battle of Celaya, for example, observing that Colonel Kloss had executed a half turn with the artillery under his command at the moment when Obregón's forces were beginning to waver, he unhesitatingly ordered him to be arrested and shot unless he could justify his conduct to the satisfaction of his superiors.

Thus the bonds of union between the chief and the rank and file were common aims, personal attachments and loyalty to the country. Naturally this ideal relationship could subsist in its plenary intensity only so long as the men under his orders were relatively few; but Obregón assures me that it was fairly well maintained among as many as three thousand men. Soon, however, owing to his rapid advancement, his command extended far beyond the radius within which his moralizing personal influence could directly reach and effectually mould the troops, however earnestly he might strive to imbue them with his own spirit of justice and moderation. His forces included large numbers of uncultured men from other armies—men on whom long years of subjection followed by brief intervals of saturnalian licence had left an abiding mark. And it was sheer impossible to keep these elements always well in hand. Among the officers too, as one learns from Obregón's own accounts, were men whose moral character was streaked with inferior or corrupt fibre, to change which was hopeless. As for the General himself, it should be noted

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that certain acts occasionally laid to his charge as unnecessarily cruel—such as the shooting of captured officers—were consequences of the Civil War and, therefore, as defensible or indefensible as the war itself.

“I always had the firm intention,” he writes, “to display benevolence in my dealings with the vanquished enemy, and of this the best proof is the treatment which the chiefs and soldiers taken at Cananea received at my hands. There I practised the maxim embodied in my manifesto of Hermosillo: ‘Respect for the conquered is the dignity of victory.’ But my disposition and endeavours to this end slackened and vanished when we learned the details of the brutal way in which Ojeda” (commander of the hostile forces) “was dealing with those of our people who fell into his hands.”

In all this one should not lose sight of the inevitable influence which a bitter Civil War invariably exercises on the most enlightened and clement of military commanders, nor of the cardinal fact that from the day when he first left his home to take up arms against the enemies of peace and constitutional government, Obregón consistently strove to permeate his troops with a spirit of humanity and moderation, while most of the hostile bodies against which he fought had no ethical idea whatever, no guiding principle and were lured by the prospect of licence, loot, promotion, or the gratitude of a chief to whom they were personally devoted. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that disinterested, nay, altruistic, attachment to a leader, an employer or a friend is a curious phenomenon which constantly recurs in the annals of the Republic, and is well worth studying. It sheds a curious sidelight on Mexican psychology and explains a painful rebuff which Obregón himself received during his first campaign against the rebel Orozco. He narrated it to me one soft southern night as we sat on the deck of a Mexican gunboat, gliding over the waters of the Pacific and talked about the past and the future of his country. The story incidentally illustrates his own generous disposition.

“As you know,” he began, “I was actuated by a firm, unqualified faith in the justice of the cause for which I was fighting, and I took it almost for granted that it would appeal with the same force to most thinking Mexicans. But to my intense disappointment I found on my arrival in the State of Chihuahua, and especially in the district in which my troops

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were quartered, that practically everybody was heart and soul with the arch-rebel, Pascual Orozco, because he enjoyed great personal popularity. For us and our cause they had no sympathy, no understanding. We were his enemies, and, therefore, theirs. That and nothing more. Nor could I get them to discuss the subject.

"Well, one morning when out riding I passed a female figure crouched on the ground. Moving nearer I noticed that she was young and comely, but pale and wasted, and that she was delving with her hand in the ground and throwing things into a basket. I bade her good morning and asked her what she was doing there.

" 'As you see, gathering roots.'

" 'What for ?'

" 'For myself and children. We must eat, war or no war !'

" 'Have you no husband then ?'

" 'Yes, I am married.'

" 'Does he not support you ? Is he out of work ?'

" 'My husband is with General Orozco, fighting, so I have to do the best I can for the children.'

" 'Well, my good woman, take this little present from me. It will help you to get something more substantial than roots for yourself and family to eat'; and with that I handed her a twenty peso gold piece. But she gave me a look half defiant, half contemptuous, and said she did not need my gold. I shall never forget that look. I've seldom felt more humiliated in my life. Offering a hurried apology, I bade her good morning and rode off, turning over in my mind this curious mixture of canine fidelity to an inferior type of man with a developed sense of personal dignity."

Obregón loathed soldiers of fortune who passed from chief to chief and forsook one army for another as the whim took them, or self-interest prompted, and he was never tired of sifting and winnowing his officers, removing the worthless without paying the slightest heed to their antecedents, special status or influential friends.

I met several of those *condottieri* during my travels in Mexico, and they gave me the impression of men naturally deficient in moral sense. Caring nothing for principles or shibboleths, the seduction of loot would cause them to change sides and—as the Irishman put it—turn their backs upon themselves in a

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twinkling. Others who were devoted partisans of Villa, Zapata or some other chief, to whose aims they were supremely indifferent, reminded me of the Italian who fought fourteen duels to prove that Tasso was a greater poet than Dante, and when he was dying exclaimed: "I still maintain that I was right, though I have not read the writings of either of the two scribblers."

Obregón was inexorable in expelling from his army all those elements which were calculated to undermine discipline or bring his troops into disrepute. In this way he raised up a little host of troublesome enemies and made but one regenerate friend. During the ups and downs of that chaotic period some of those rancorous outcasts were on the very point of glutting their petty spite by taking his life or witnessing his execution. But like other men of destiny, he bore a charmed life and appeared to his soldiers invulnerable. As the Turks express it: "If you have luck and are thrown into the sea, you will come up with a fish in your mouth"; and many of Obregón's experiences appeared to confirm the saying.

It may not be amiss to chronicle one of the many incidents connected with Obregón's weeding-out process, inasmuch as it offers a little picture illustrating one of the enduring phases of Mexican use and wont in contact with the ever-new muck-rake which is to sweep all the old rubbish away.

A promising young officer of good family came to General Obregón with letters of recommendation asking for a suitable place in his army. His credentials being unimpeachable, he was taken over and entrusted with a position of responsibility. It then became part of his duty to receive certain purchases made for the army and to pay the bills. When General Obregón, who is a shrewd business man, looked over the accounts a few days later, he noticed that the newly-arrived officer had taken for himself fifteen or twenty per cent. of the sums paid. Without more ado he sat down and wrote an order of the day, setting forth the fact, degrading the officer and expelling him from the army.

The order had to be typed, and the delinquent in virtue of his office had cognizance of it before anyone else. He hastened to the General and besought him tearfully to withdraw it. His explanation was simple:

"I never even suspected that I was doing wrong, because

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I merely followed a custom which is universal. I always did it. So do all the others. It is supposed to be one of our perquisites. I could not, therefore, know that in your army it was forbidden. Had I been aware that you regard it as a grave offence I never would have taken a *centavo*. So much for the past. As for the future, I swear to you that I will never fall into that error again. But please take back the expulsion order, for that would be my ruin."

As Obregón was inexorable, the officer played his last trump card.

"If you publish the order," he said, "you will have signed my death warrant. I will at once blow my brains out. Surely you will not have my death on your conscience?"

"Do you seriously mean to say that you will commit suicide?"

"I do emphatically."

"Well, that, of course, alters the matter. In that case I promise to reinstate you posthumously in your rank, to restore your good name and to give you an officer's burial with military honours."

Thereupon the young man slunk out of the room with his head hanging down, like a criminal on his way to execution.

"Did he blow his brains out?" I asked.

"No. He went back to civil life, mended his ways and rose in the social scale. Whenever I meet him now—which is seldom—he invariably thanks me for the bitter but salutary lesson I administered to him in the summer of 1915."

To curb the common soldier was a task much more difficult than to keep the officers' corps within moderate bounds. The rank and file of the army was composed of men who, to put it mildly, lacked education and instruction. They were characterized by the cunning, the obstinacy, the waywardness and simplicity of children of Nature. By way of illustrating one side of their psychology, I should like to narrate a little incident which happened to Obregón in connection with his endeavours to discipline his men. They were inordinately fond of displaying their emotions by emptying their rifles in the air and wasting their ammunition. They continue to practise the bad habit to-day. Obregón forbade it strictly, but now and then his order was disobeyed.

One day a number of shots had been fired to welcome the



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arrival of a train, and some arrests were made in consequence. One of the prisoners, an Indian soldier, against whom there appeared as witness an officer who had seen the smoke from his rifle, appealed to the General. Obregón, having heard the evidence, confirmed the sentence of arrest, but the Indian persisted in denying his guilt and pleading for acquittal.

“I swear to you, General, that I did not fire.”

“But the officer there saw smoke come out of your rifle, and that settles the matter.”

“No, General, it does not. I admit that there was smoke. I saw it myself and was surprised. But it was old smoke.”

The murder of Madero let loose an unprecedented storm which, with brief intervals of ominous calm, raged for years from one extremity of the Republic to the other, blasting and blighting everything of worth, material and moral, finally carrying the Mexican people to the edge of the Gulf of Tophet. A babel of tongues, a hotch-potch of “principles,” a *chassez-croisez* of “emancipators,” and a Saturnalia of crime were the chief elements of this reign of anarchy. Protests against the usurper Huerta were heard on every side, and were speedily followed by the thunder of war. The rebels followed the wise example of Venustiano Carranza, the then Governor of Coahuila, who proclaimed himself an upholder of the Constitution, whence the name Constitutionals was applied to all the adversaries of the despot.

President Wilson, one of Huerta’s brilliant and most powerful antagonists abroad, refused to recognize him, and, overstepping the limits of international law and custom, actually aided and abetted his domestic enemies, from whom, however, he received no thanks. At first the leaders of the rebels were numerous, scattered and unorganized. Their one bond of union was their resolve to depose Huerta and elect a civilian for his successor. The American President allowed them to procure arms and ammunition from the United States, while denying supplies to Huerta. He ordered the United States Admiral, Fletcher, to hinder the landing of arms for Huerta’s army from a German steamer near Veracruz, and in order to effect this the foreign Admiral seized the Custom House of that city which was soon afterwards attacked and taken by American Marines. By these measures the United States

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violated the sovereignty of Mexico and the law of nations, and dealt a stunning blow to the President. Again, when the rebels had invested Tampico and were about to capture it, two of Huerta's gunboats started from Veracruz to Tampico to help their comrades and would probably have succeeded had not an American warship warned the gunboats off the harbour. In short, on three or four occasions more or less decisive, the United States Government intervened illegally against Carranza's domestic enemies, and elicited indignant protests from the rebels who profited by the intervention as well as from Huerta's Government, against which it was directed.

Events gradually sifting the real from the apparent leaders of the rebellion, the names of Carranza, Villa, Zapata and a few others stood out in relief as the embodiment of the Constitutionalist movement. Later on, Obregón rose into prominence, but for a time his specific value was not fully recognized. The official head of the revolutionary party was Carranza, who had sat in the legislature, administered a province and made himself thoroughly acquainted with the history of his native land, and of Latin America generally. Tall and robust, somewhat heavy and awkward in his movements, his placid and intelligent look inspired confidence, and his slow, deliberate speech confirmed the impression. A man, the workings of whose mind are simple and calculable, one might say after the first conversation. But this judgment would soon have to be reversed. Few of his fellow-rebels, at any rate at the outset, realized the complex character or the shallow judgment of their First Chief, as he afterwards came to be called. And when the truth dawned upon those who might have denied him the power which he employed to defeat their ostensible aims, they supported his cause as a lesser evil than a new schism would have been.

Neither the object of the first local campaign against Orozco nor its duration or intensity had afforded Obregón adequate scope for the full development of his powers. And what is more to the point, there is no evidence that during that campaign those grandiose conceptions of which he subsequently became the exponent had seized his imagination. He was still in process of evolution, watching events, scrutinizing the action of men and rolling up hill what might prove to be the

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stone of Sisyphus in the form of emancipating the Republic from rogues and robbers. But military achievements never blinded him to the primacy of his moral task, nor did he account them more than a means of contributing to the spiritual and material well-being of his country. While he was still in the North, bloody battles were fought in other places between Federalists and rebels, which decided nothing. Nor was it until Villa, the genius of evil, took the field that the fortune of arms began to incline towards the Constitutionals.

## CHAPTER VII

### CREATING AN ARMY

THE details of Obregón's various battles during a campaign of 8,000 kilometres are of little interest to the foreigner.\* Certain of their episodes, however, are worth recording for the light which they shed on his inner evolution. In this development there was no sudden break, no transformation, no swerving from right to left or from left to right. It was but a gradual bringing out, a revealing of the lines of the mould in which his inner nature was cast. Character, which, after all, is but responsiveness to a certain order of motives, may, as many think, be fixed for ever on the day of one's birth. Circumstance merely draws within human ken this or that trait which might otherwise have lain quiescent and unsuspected. A fiery crisis like that through which Obregón passed during eight years tends to disclose them all. And from this viewpoint his modes of thought and action during the vicissitudes of the revolutionary movement are worth more than a passing glance.

Faced with a wild, chaotic welter of conflicting human wills, which were stirred by no ethical motive, he contrived to inspire many of them with a yearning for social order, with an incipient sense of duty, and with a touch of his own ardent faith in the destiny of his country. Those half-savage, intractable children of nature became plastic in his hands. In a word, he was an educator as well as a leader, and it is in that rôle that he has done most to serve his country and human kind. It is an interesting spectacle to watch how adverse circumstances and smiling fortune called forth in turn the precise quality demanded by each successive event, and how nicely

\* He has himself recorded them in a very interesting work entitled: "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña."

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he kept the balance poised between exalted passion and sobering reflection.

When he quitted the peaceful, humdrum life of a farmer for the camp and the battlefield, he had to educate his associates and his men, and naturally he began by educating himself. Commencing with a body of 300 raw recruits, he ended by commanding over 40,000 more or less trained men, many of whom—however unaware of the fact the foreigner may be—are now citizens, conscious not only of their rights, but also to some extent of their duties. Although subsequently pitted against professional soldiers, like General Angeles, whose technical proficiency had received the hall-mark of European experts, he scored triumph after triumph, sometimes against tremendous odds, until at last he broke the reactionary forces definitively.

Obregón has a winsome way of approaching those whom he desires to lead, a charm of manner and something more effective still, an elusive quality which to many is irresistible. Even when addressing a chance crowd, he diffuses somewhat of his personality among them, communicates his own cheerful optimism, and raises them, temporarily at least, to a higher plane of thought and sentiment. Instinctively he utters the words which are best suited to the occasion, however unexpectedly this may have arisen, and are most easily assimilated by his audience. I have stood by his side scores of times while he delivered improvised speeches, sometimes of international import, and only once did he give utterance to a sentiment which, in my judgment, it might have been better to suppress. That sureness of criterion is not the outcome of mere prudence. No man knows better than he when to fling prudence to the winds and dare to do what the majority of men would term an act of foolhardiness, which, however, seldom fails to attain the object aimed at. The source of this sureness of touch is a high degree of intuition, one of those elements of greatness with which his few intimate friends know him to be endowed.

Obregón possesses another quality, the practical value of which to the successful leader of a revolution and ruler of a nation can hardly be overestimated. He can say "No" to an entreating friend and confiding comrade with a quiet firmness equalled only by his amiable way of uttering it. In this respect I know of only one man who can equal him—Aristide

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Briand. They both captivate the men whom they are unable or unwilling to oblige. I have been present many times when Obregón refused urgent demands, turned down cherished projects, shattered fond hopes, and I could not but admire the various degrees of urbanity which he displayed in announcing his decisions. Again, he can make a man feel that the best way to extricate himself from a dangerous situation is to face it and brave the consequences.

Gradually Obregón's army became something like a real organism, and its chief grew head-like on the trunk. He surrounded himself with enthusiastic and intelligent officers on whom he could place absolute reliance. His troops never left the field without having won the battle or attained their objective, and their commander earned the unstinted praise of expert soldiers, as well as the high tribute of rivals, which assumes the form of envy. In time his men, as has been said, came to look upon his life as charmed and his onslaughts as irresistible, and whatever one may say of the superstition that wove the legend, many of the events of the Civil War imparted colour to the belief. He escaped from precarious positions into which the mistakes of others, or lack of information, or his own audacity had placed him; he dislodged his adversary from strongholds that seemed impregnable; he routed superior forces, outwitted professional strategists trained in European schools, and ended by definitively terminating the Civil War.

Wholly devoid of the devotional spirit, and even of that spectacular turn of mind which enables many men to find a substitute for religious sentiment in the search after a solution of the fundamental problems which have exercised the noblest thinkers in all ages and countries, Obregón half consciously defies the conception of duty and obeys its promptings as implicitly, wholeheartedly and irrespective of consequences as if they emanated from an all-powerful deity, or as though he were a firm believer in the force of Kant's categorical imperative. It is interesting to watch, as I have often done, these streaks of unrecognized spirituality intertwined among the threads of a materialistic existence. He attributes this devotion to duty to the early teachings of his sisters who, curiously enough, Catholics though they are, as are all his women folk, have never influenced his theory of life. In this respect he differs wholly from Count Witte, who was a believing

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member of the Orthodox Church, and resembles those French precursors of the Revolution who, like Turgot, managed to connect materialism by invisible threads through subterranean ways with the uttermost fringe of spirituality.

Obregón had a sharp eye for men, and his estimate of their strength, weakness, and fitness for certain kinds of work, grounded largely on intuition, was oftentimes surprisingly correct. Officers like Calles, Eugenio Martinez, Angel Flores and others, are living proofs of this rare gift. His first meeting with Carranza, the man whom he raised to the presidency in the name of certain principles, and then overthrew in virtue of the same principles, offers a striking instance of the rapidity and acumen with which he discovered the weak points of men. They came together one evening at a place called Fuerte, in Sinaloa. Carranza, Obregón and Adolfo de la Huerta, afterwards provisional president of the Republic, sat and talked matters over for a couple of hours. When the first named had taken leave, de la Huerta inquired of Obregón what he thought of their First Chief.

"I have seen too little of him," he replied, "to have a judgment. But I can give you my impressions about his qualities as a commander. He is a great man for little things, and a small one for great ones. The individual trees would hinder him from seeing the forest as a whole. And he is persistent and dogmatic to boot."

"That is an interesting estimate," remarked de la Huerta, "but I am curious to know on what you base it."

"It is partly intuitive and partly founded on a number of mere trifles which, like straws that show the direction of the wind, give me an indication of the man's specific quality. I will give you one instance. During our conversation with him this evening, he stopped short twice or thrice and went outside to see whether his horse had been properly fed and looked after. Now, we know that he has a man to see to his horse, and if the man were worth his salt, there was no need of the chief looking after him. This is but one case. There were others. And they seem to indicate that he has a bent for details, and that his mind is irresistibly attracted to particular circumstances in lieu of taking in the whole."

Another instance of Obregón's intuition was displayed after his first interview with the accomplished soldier Felipe

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Angeles, who won laurels in Europe, and whose technical proficiency had no match in the Republic.

"What do you think of Angeles, now that you have talked with him?" asked Carranza. "I consider his military accomplishment very great, but his judgment unbalanced," was the answer. "That man's attachment to the revolution, and to you as its head, is purely intellectual. One day you will have him for an enemy." Carranza, dissenting, shook his head. But the forecast came true. Angeles, some years later, was shot with Carranza's consent as a traitor.

Carranza, who was wholly incapable of directing a campaign, or even a battle, occasionally intervened and issued orders suggested by some of his military friends, or prompted by his personal policy of holding the balance even between two rising Generals. Once he was on the point of sacrificing a fine opportunity, and together with it the success of the campaign, to these impulses. Obregón at the time was with his troops in the capital,\* when he unexpectedly received Carranza's order to evacuate the city, reconcentrate his troops at Ometusco, and destroy the Central and National lines from Queretaro to the capital. Astonished and worried by this amazing plan, he answered that he would like to submit to the First Chief its consequences. It would be tantamount to the recognition of impotence, and it would leave the Constitutional bodies of troops in the north, east and west to be cut up by Villa, one after the other.

Carranza, aware of the deficiency in Obregón's military training, regarded it as a misfortune and a danger. He never quite knew to what that General's marvellous success should be ascribed. Hence his desire during the war to complete the military education of the leader on whose success or failure depended the fate of the revolution and his own. And he went about this educational experiment in his peculiar way. One day, at a critical stage of the civil war, he sent for the commander of the north-eastern forces and said :

"General Obregón, your natural military talents are considerable and nobody admires them more than I do. But they are capable of being greatly improved by study. You are now about to confront an arduous task, and I am very keen to assist you. Do you see those books there?" and he pointed to a

\* Early in March, 1915.



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great pile of bound volumes. "They are the lives of various great warriors who influenced the course of history by their brilliant victories. Julius Cæsar, Scipio, Frederick the Great, Napoleon and others, and they contain clever analyses of their campaigns. Now, I want you to read them very carefully at once, with a view to obtaining an insight into the art of war. You are sure to profit greatly by such a study of the world's decisive battles as you only, with your experience, are capable of making. Please accept then this little present."

Obregón replied that he was greatly beholden to the First Chief for his kind thought and the form in which he had expressed it. It was perfectly true, he continued, that he had never read anything about strategy, tactics or other purely military subjects. He believed, however, that experience had made good this deficiency. But even were it otherwise, he could not derive much profit from the study of operations which were conducted under conditions and with weapons so different from those of the twentieth century, and in countries which had little in common with Mexico. For these reasons he feared he could not avail himself of the well-meant offer, but later on, when peace and order were restored, if he should have the requisite leisure, he might perhaps read over one or more of the volumes. Carranza frowned and the matter dropped. Carranza was not wholly wrong, nor was Obregón entirely right.

In truth, Obregón displayed a rare capacity for extracting the utmost from the lessons of experience, deducing from them many of the principles and formulas which were taught in the military academies of Europe. In this process of deduction his initiative powers and his practical knowledge of men stood him in good stead. It was this knowledge, coupled with his own peculiar charm, which won for him the sympathies of those who came within his reach, and enabled him to communicate to them his own steady confidence.

I once questioned him about the cares of the chief of a great organization, whether it be an army or a state, and the difficulty of apportioning one's time to the various duties involved. His remark was instructive.

"Such a man," he said, "cannot allow himself to be entangled in the coils of departmental details or red tape of any kind. He should, of course, have sufficient grasp of detail to

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enable him to overlook the whole, but his own special function is to choose the right men, in whose judgment and rectitude he has good grounds for confidence, and having given them general instructions, to allow them to grapple with the details. They, on their part, must choose their subordinates by the same criteria. If the results are unsatisfactory the responsible individual must go. Only in this way can you get an organic whole whose brain is the directing but not intermeddling chief."

I had previously heard something very similar to this from the head of the General Staff of a certain Central European State. He said: "I depend for the success of my plans very largely upon the judgment, resource and conscientiousness of my subordinates. I issue a command in terms which are more or less general. The officer who takes it visualizes the ground, considers the obstacles, the way to surmount them, the time required, and the time available. Then he frames his scheme for executing certain parts of the work, but delegates other details to subalterns, and so the division of labour goes on until the non-commissioned officer is reached. And he, as the link between the brains and the arms that obey them, plays an important part in the general scheme. In no other way can a large army be manipulated."

I then remarked to General Obregón that a corollary of his method is that the selection of governmental organs should be made on lines that have nothing in common with politics. He at once assented, adding that one of the curses of the country is the infusion of politics into all branches of the public service.

"I," he said, "am for employing the best talent of the nation, irrespective of political considerations. A cabinet minister who is preparing the ground, say, for his election to the presidency, is sorely—irresistibly—tempted to subordinate his duties to considerations tending towards the goal of his aspirations. And that is the bane of all government. You see the same thing in legislative assemblies: a deputy arises and delivers a sensible speech or brings in a useful bill, whereupon another rushes to the tribune and goes further in quest of applause from the gallery. Then a third denounces them both as reactionaries and surpasses them in radicalism. Unless you have a group of reasonable and courageous legislators, strong enough to withstand those demagogues, the laws run the risk of becoming either dissolvents or else a dead letter."

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Among the many maxims which Obregón forged for his own use in operating with his forces in the field, a few are worth glancing at as indications of the workings of his mind. It should not, however, be forgotten that, as they referred to Mexican psychology, they lay no claim to universality. The first was of a purely military order and contains nothing new: "Make no definite plans without having first become acquainted with all the elements of the problem you are seeking to solve." And it was easier for him than for any other commander to carry this out, owing to his rare capacity of noticing every peculiarity in the conformation of any region which he had once traversed, and to his amazingly retentive memory. I have known him to describe a hilly country over which he had once passed several years before, and every item in the picture had its counterpart in the hills, valleys, glens and lakes. The maxim, however, is but a specific application of the principle which he holds with tenacity that *a priori* solutions, whether they assume the shape of legislative reforms or general policies, should be banished from the programme of a statesman. "Only when an issue is ripe for settlement would I take it up, and then, before dealing with it practically, I would ascertain its cause, so that my remedy might go to the root."

Again: "Not until I am sure that the course I am about to take is the right one, do I act; but then I throw my heart and soul into it and do it at once. I never undertake a thing half-heartedly. It is much better not to begin at all. Vacillation spells failure. . . . In war, and doubtless in most of life's struggles, it is audacity that carries victory in its train, but, as I intimated, audacity born of previous deliberation. The most audacious enemy I have ever yet encountered was Villa. He sometimes undertook the seemingly impossible, and achieved it, too, as when he crossed the Sierra Madre mountains in the depth of winter, taking his artillery with him. No such feat has been accomplished in this country, and I make bold to say in any other."

As he ventured upon this assertion, my memory took me back to Hannibal's march over the Alps, to Napoleon's exploits in the same line, and I regretted that Obregón had refused Carranza's present of the lives and military history of those and other captains of ancient and modern times. I also called to mind Obregón's own march across the same Sierra over

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which Villa passed, the only difference between the two being that Obregón marched over the mountains in the rainy season, with fewer men and without artillery.

He had no favourites. Towards his friends his attitude has never been that of his time and country. Drawing a marked distinction between private friendship and public trust, he has ever sought to emphasize it with a corresponding difference. It is true, however, that in the army his personal associates were exclusively men in whose military qualities he could place implicit confidence, such as Generals Eugenio Martinez, Calles and Angel Flores, who appear to have fully deserved this distinction. Obregón always listened attentively to the views of his fellow workers, but unless the grounds on which such opinions were founded appealed to him forcibly he followed his own judgment. Thus he has oftentimes had to differ from and sometimes to combat the insistent counsels volunteered to him by his friends. In field tactics, for example, he introduced an innovation which was unanimously condemned, and yet was justified by the event. He was wont to place his cavalry in the rear instead of at the front.

The solid reasons which he was usually able to bring forward in favour of any line of action which he proposed to take sufficed in most cases to convince his staff, but whenever they differed from him absolutely, the result showed that he was right. "I have sometimes had to strike out a course condemned in advance by all my friends," he once told me. A typical example occurred in May, 1920, when Carranza endeavoured to frighten him into crossing the frontier into the United States. "I am going to Mexico City," exclaimed Obregón. "Then you are walking into a death-trap with your eyes open," answered his friends. Everybody argued with him, his family implored him not to go, in a word, there was not one person among all cognizant of his intention who approved it. "I feel that it is the only thing to do. I am impelled to do it," replied Obregón. "Carranza expects me to quit the country and his plans are based upon that. He cannot imagine that I would dare to come to the capital. Well, I will give him a surprise that will disconcert him and upset his tactics."

Another example of this independence of judgment was

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given at the battle of Celaya\* where the enemy disposed of forces several times more numerous than those of Obregón and the fortune of war seemed for a time to have abandoned him. Two thousand losses were reported to him, and his staff were of the opinion that the best move to make would be the withdrawal of the forces to Queretaro. Obregón demurred. "We must go on fighting," he added. "Well, but if Villa continues to decimate us as he has been doing, there will be none of us left. And then?" "Then we shall have discharged our duty to the full. Not before." So they kept up the fight, which terminated in a complete victory for Obregón.

He was wont to say: "Never do what your enemy's movements are calculated to force you to do. Surprise him by a wholly different manœuvre which he could not have counted on." This maxim once helped him out of a position the critical character of which was not realized at the time and has never been made public. Having occupied Mexico City† with his usual audacity and insufficient forces, he was confronted by powerful adversaries within and without, his munitions running short, the enemy gradually closing round him, having dislodged him from Xochimilco, a village in the environs, he saw no way out of the situation but to evacuate the capital. But this appeared to be almost as desperate a device as to remain besieged. For the enemy could certainly harass his forces and capture a considerable number, if he had wind of Obregón's intention. The opinion of the generals was that all preparations for the withdrawal be made in secret. But Obregón turning the matter over in his mind, agreed that the secret must necessarily leak out were it only because the requisite orders could not be executed without the besiegers becoming aware of their object. This, then, is what he did: He publicly announced his intention, had it published in the newspapers, together with his own commands bearing upon its execution. The enemy accordingly had all the data in his hands but foolishly concluded that this was part of a manœuvre devised for the purpose of throwing him off his guard. When the day broke‡ and the withdrawal began the besiegers were

\* Celaya is in the state of Guanajuato. The battle lasted three days—18th, 14th and 15th April, 1915.

† In March, 1915.

‡ "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña," p. 59.

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wholly unprepared and the city was evacuated with relative ease and without serious loss.

The reference to this strategem made by Obregón himself in his book, reveals not perhaps so much his modesty as his generous consideration of his fellow workers. He states that the success was attributable to the listlessness of the enemy, not to special ability on his part.

Obregón does not recognize as a virtue that conventional and apparent suppression or distortion of truth which commonly goes by the name of modesty. He states facts as they were even when they redound to his credit or to that of another person and pays no heed to the ensuing charge of self-praise or flattery. It is, however, fair to say that in his own published description of his campaigns, there is nowhere to be found a sentence or a word which lends colour to the charge either of false modesty or of conceit. Certainly he made many mistakes in the course of his military career, was aware of some of them and used these as stepping stones to keep himself immune from them in the future. But he was always as ready to admit his blunders as to correct them.

Asked once by a man who evinced an intelligent interest in his military operations, to what he ascribed his many successes, this was his answer :

“To the fortunate circumstance that I committed fewer errors than my antagonist, and profited more by his than did he by mine.”

More than once he publicly confessed his slips with the same frankness with which he testified to the ability of his opponent. In his book\* for example, he writes of a battle at the close of which a splendid opportunity had offered for profiting by the rout of a cruel enemy. Obregón writes of himself.

“I hold that it was a mistake on my part not to have thrown a body of my troops against Guaymas in order to fructify the panic which seized the garrison there when they received the news of Ojeda’s disaster.”

Obregón once† persuaded Carranza to allow a conference of generals convened for the purpose of coming to terms with the rebel Villa to be held in a part of the country where Villa

\* “Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña,” p. 109.

† In September, 1914.

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was practically the all powerful ruler.\* The outcome was a complete failure, as Carranza had predicted. Touching upon this gathering in his book, he writes: "It behoves me to confess that that convention was a failure, inasmuch as far from attaining our object, which was to detach as many followers as possible from Villa, we made it superlatively difficult for them to abandon him. The fact is we left him invested with the appearance of legality and this determined the decision of many of the leaders who, had there been no convention, would have remained loyal to the first chief, Carranza, to separate themselves from him and join Villa. . . . I therefore am the first to accept the responsibility which should of right fall upon me, for the political error, and I can but plead that my exertions were inspired by the persistent desire to save the country from war."†

These expressions are characteristic of the tone of Obregón's book and of the franchise and detachment with which he judges himself.

Bombast and flattery then are both alien to his nature. If he were endowed with high poetic gifts he would certainly try his hand at an epic. It is impossible to read without admiring the narrator as well as the military commander, his plain narrative of the successful and perilous passage of his troops over the western mountains,‡ Sierra Madre Occidental, during the torrential downpour of the rainy season.

In this connection it may be permissible to remark that he has constantly displayed an unconquerable aversion to outward show and theatrical display, so dear to the average military man. But then Obregón was never a militarist—only a courageous citizen, fighting for what he deemed a noble cause. Some years ago in his capacity as Secretary of War, he was invited to appear in the national palace, where Carranza was to take the oath of fidelity to the Constitution, and to put on his gala uniform. Now, the Mexican General's uniform was spectacularly ornate, and must make its wearer either a worm or a demigod. Obregón replied that he would appear if the

\* In Aguas Calientes.

† "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña," p. 333

‡ "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña," p. 109.

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president wished it, but would not don the gorgeous dress. In fact he possessed none. The adjutant called a second time and received the same answer. Finally he was dispensed from appearing in festive garb. Afterwards Carranza gently rebuked him for his excessive modesty, and assured him that his military career had been creditable enough to warrant him dressing in the most ornate garb a Mexican tailor could turn out. Obregón's answer was characteristic :

"It was not modesty, true or false, that actuated my refusal. It was my rooted aversion to the histrionic element in life. I love simplicity. As for modesty, I cannot recognize it as a virtue. It is but a conventional mask donned to do away with the appearance of superiority—a concession to mediocrity. My own qualities are well known to myself, as are such results as they have enabled me to achieve, and I frankly confess that—I am as conscious of them as I am of the exploits and talents of my best officers. But I hate display."

In his own army, Obregón, who at heart was a strong anti-militarist, condemned war as immoral and characterized its methods as savagery, rose to be an idol. His presence aroused enthusiasm among the soldiers, who were ready to rush to certain death in response to his words. For he always took them by their best side and assumed that they were all as heroic and devoted to duty as he wished them to be. "Take it for granted that men are what you want them to be and treat them accordingly. Many of them will then rise to the occasion and some will remain permanently at the new level," he once said to me.

A striking example of the kind of officers he obtained by these means is that of a young man of eighteen or nineteen who, during the fighting, was seen to court danger deliberately—wantonly as it seemed to his chief—for wherever a man was struck down or a shell exploded he at once moved into the vacant place. At last he was called up and questioned as to the motive of his behaviour. With tears in his eyes he explained that his conscience was torn asunder by two conflicting duties. He felt that he was fighting in a good cause and would therefore not abandon it for any consideration. On the other hand his father was in the enemy's army and in a couple of days the two would be face to face and he could not run the risk of killing his own parent. Hence his ardent desire was to be



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dead before encountering his father's troops. His explanation was accepted and a day or two later he was found among the fallen.

Even children flocked to Obregón's standard and contributed their mites to his victories. On this detail the humanitarian and indeed the average man will dwell with profound regret or fiery indignation, that these little ones should have been allowed to share the hardships and face the horrors of such a ruthless campaign. And the biographer has neither justification nor excuse to offer for this unnecessary trait of the savagery termed civil war, but our reprobation should not prevent us from trying to understand how it came about that boys of ten and twelve were often fighting in the ranks. It should be said that every Mexican army is accompanied by a host of women, the wives, married and unmarried, of the privates. It is they who cook the victuals for their respective husbands, dress their slighter wounds, tend them when ill, and make up as far as humanly possible for the deficiencies of the commissariat, which are formidable. Now some of those women had children who helped their mothers and occasionally a boy of ten or eleven when relatively well-developed would seize a gun and fight together with his elders and then remain in the ranks. In peace times, too, wherever there are soldiers their women folk are with them. One of those children, a boy of eleven, named Gonzales, took part in several sanguinary encounters and finally got to be known as the little general (*generalito*). He had one or two hairbreadth escapes until at the battle of El Resplandor his corpse was found among the dead. It was taken up tenderly and buried with military honours.

With equal glory, if one can term it so, and with better luck, another little boy of ten, named Jesus Martinez, fought on horseback under Obregón's orders, saving his troops from defeat in one of the deciding engagements of the civil war. As usual, want of cartridges was the main cause of the precarious situation. Four battalions which had been holding strong positions suddenly abandoned them and went off to seek for ammunition! Obregón, perceiving this and the easy task that now confronted the enemy, was driven almost to despair. He at once ordered the reserve munitions to be taken to the front. But to get the men back was more difficult.

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He sought for his trumpeter, but the only one he was able to find, was little Martinez who rode up and blew the familiar call until he was well nigh exhausted, while the general moved hither and thither gathering and shepherding his dispersed flock back to their places of danger. "We should have been lost that day," he remarked to me, "had it not been for that little child."

Another characteristic incident in this lugubrious children's tragedy occurred at the battle of El Resplandor already alluded to. Villa's troops fought with unwonted fury. In five minutes his artillery fire had killed well over three hundred men, to say nothing of the wounded. After the engagement had terminated Obregón and his staff were walking over the field of battle, when they came across a child of twelve, a regular soldier, who was digging a hole with his mattock. "What are you doing here, my boy?" inquired the General. "I am making a grave for my father. That there is his corpse"—and he pointed to a lifeless body in front of him. "But don't worry. We came here together and I killed that Villist there myself. It was he who did it," and he triumphantly indicated the rigid form of an officer of the enemy's force whose life he had taken to avenge his father.

These dramatic incidents in which children were the precocious actors, had a touching parallel in the French Revolution, the student of which will not have forgotten the heroic death of the child drummer Barra, who, when offered his life by the Vendean defenders of the fallen regime if only he would cry "*Vive le Roy*," shouted "*Vive la République*," and the next instant was shot dead.

But it was not only children who were drawn thus irresistibly into the headstrong current of the Revolution by Obregón's charm. Everybody felt its magic power, and the minds of soldiers and officers alike were attuned to limitless confidence in his leadership, to faith in his doctrine which came to them almost in religious guise, and to belief in their own power to achieve the most arduous ventures. Men undertook feats which appeared impossible of accomplishment, and failure in which meant death. Accustomed to carry out the orders of their chiefs without vacillation or delay, they disobeyed them categorically, almost automatically, when they were directed against Obregón by some leader turned traitor. For example,

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on one occasion, General Lucio Blanco, abandoning the cause of the Revolution, planned to entrap Obregón and put him to death. Blanco commanded two Colonels to set out from the capital to a little town in the vicinity\* and destroy the railway over which Obregón had to pass, and capture his train and himself. But, instead of executing these orders, the two officers went to General Obregón, apprised him of Blanco's intent and asked for instructions, which they duly received. It was from like motives that certain other officers disobeyed their commander Villa, saved Obregón's life and embraced his cause. In a word he was the living soul of the Revolutionary movement.

On another critical occasion, after a powerful speech by Obregón, Colonel R. F. Noriega, who was in hospital with a serious wound, left his bed, together with a number of other wounded† and marched to the environs of the village,‡ where they took their stand and fought with valour until they were all killed. Their heroic action, however, had its effect in disconcerting the enemy, delaying his measures for attack, and enabling Obregón's forces to remove their military trains. Episodes of this character were frequent and inspiring. In the Spring of 1913, Obregón, who at that time was only a colonel, during his campaign in the North, addressed his troops just before they were to make an audacious assault. Hardly had he finished speaking when a captain§ and four soldiers, all lying in bed with bandaged wounds, jumped down and besought him to permit them to take an active part in the attack. "I granted their request with pleasure," he added, "and their example fired the others with splendid enthusiasm. They paid for their heroism with their lives."

These and a number of other traits acquired for Obregón among malevolent critics the epithets of heartless and brutal. To refute such charges is almost superfluous. While, during a campaign he undoubtedly bent all his efforts towards the defeat of the enemy to the neglect of secondary matters, he never lost an opportunity of alleviating the lot of the wounded,

\* Guadalupe.

† Generals José T. Robles, Eugenio A. Benavides, Colonel R. G. Garcia and others.

‡ Silas.

§ Tiburcio Morales.

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the sick, and especially of the common people who took no part in the civil war. We have seen how, at San Joaquin, when his reputation, the fate of his soldiers and his own were trembling in the balance, he refused to allow the village folk to abandon their homes, risk their lives and join him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHARGES OF CRUELTY

IN the army Obregón contrived to engender confidence among the soldiers by his word and confirm it by his victories. Hence he could invariably count on them to volunteer for the most audacious enterprises. He tested this early in his military career. On one occasion he obtained the reluctant assent of his commander, whom I refrain from naming, to attack the enemy, then stationed at San Joaquin (Sonora), and even this extorted permission was given only because he who gave it under-estimated the number of the opposing forces, which were about 900-1,000, whereas Obregón had only 150. As soon as the latter started off, the general remarked to his staff: "Obregón and his so-called invincible Mayos\* will now have their hands full." The attacking troops arrived on the spot and hid in a wood. In the village several peasants, after a talk with Obregón, volunteered to join him. He answered:

"No; we are soldiers, and it is our duty to attack the enemy, whereas yours is to attend to your hearths and homes."

While the combat was going on, an officer asked the general why he did not send reinforcements to help out Obregón. The answer was that he lacked horses. Horses, however, were soon found in abundance, but the general then answered: "Obregón was keen on going. Let him now realize what was involved in his insistence. He shall not have help." The enemy, assuming that it had a much superior force to withstand, was beaten after a battle of four hours. The prisoners were numerous and 200 horses were taken. The general then gave Obregón the usual Mexican embrace, said "Bravo," and the incident was forgotten until now.

\* A warlike Indian tribe living on the banks of the river Mayo in Sonora. They are akin to the Yaquis. General Obregón speaks their language.

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It is, perhaps, natural that foreigners whose vested interests suffered and whose sensibilities were shocked by the horrors of the long civil war, should regard it as the opening of the sluice gates of chaos and the release of the disruptive forces of hell. They refused to regard it even as war in the sense of the word then accepted in progressive countries. So long as that view prevailed, it was impossible for them to treat seriously the strategy and successes of the various commanders. Nor has any type of leader been recognized among them except those of the knave and the dupe, the former who, to further his own petty purposes, plunders the defenceless civil population and robs the nation for whose welfare he professes to be fighting, and the latter who follows the lead of the heroes of evil, impelled by personal attachment or by a natural desire to be at least the handle of the hammer when the alternative is the rôle of the anvil. Hence foreign observers, with a few exceptions, looked upon all the armies in the Mexican civil war as mere pillaging mobs, liable to periodic paroxysms of wild fury.

This analysis was largely correct, before Obregón came upon the scene. With his advent it ceased to be so. Moreover since then the world war, with its refined cruelties and diabolical savagery, has taught people to look upon the matter with different eyes. Doubtless the Mexican civil war was also a series of outrages on everything that cultured humanity had been taught to respect. Prisoners were sometimes shot, the wounded were butchered, women were raped, towns were sacked, churches were turned into stables, and the holiest of shrines were abominably desecrated. All this is true. And yet in the very midst of that seething ooze of primeval savagery was a centre whence emanated words of order. But, for a long while in the maelstrom of forces of moral and social dissolution, it was almost impossible to discern any signs of a movement towards betterment. And gradually a network of legend began to cover contemporary Mexico, and more especially its military forces—an odious legend which has had a long life and is not yet dead. Now, whatever these sowers of savagery may have been, and truly they were bad enough, cowardice was not one of their vices. They knew how to fight and die. Fanatics many of them were, and ferocious enemies, most of them, but at least they

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were intrepid, enduring, unafraid of death. And a few of their generals—just a few—stand out from the dead level category as gifted men and heroic warriors, worthy of figuring side by side with the prominent commanders of recent times. I have been over many of the battlefields, enjoyed the privilege of having General Obregón for my guide, and have heard vivid descriptions of many encounters from himself, his friends and his former enemies. I have no hesitation in mentioning besides himself, Generals Eugenio Martinez and Angel Flores, as the most gifted military commanders in the Republic.

A striking example of the persistence of the legend alluded to above, occurred some time ago in one of the London Press organs which long enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for correct information about foreign countries and peoples. An account appeared in the month of September, 1920, of the alleged experience of a British officer during the recent revolution, in which the martial qualities of the Mexican troops are described as below zero. "They flee almost from shadows and are the laughing stock of trained soldiers." Nothing could be at greater variance with the facts than this caricature. The Mexican soldier generally, and particularly the troops commanded by Obregón, are, for endurance, dash and intrepidity, equal to the best in Europe. What they undoubtedly lack, as do the Turkish armies, is intelligent initiative. The transformation of a large section of the fighting forces of the Republic, their moralization—if one may employ this term—was the task which Obregón seriously attempted and went far towards solving. When he first took up arms, he was confronted with chaotic conditions from which it seemed impossible to evolve order. The fatality of the situation lay in the absence of cohesion, the lack of a strong leader, the falling away of all restraint, the ease with which criminal audacity and recklessness, embodied in a peon, a cowboy, a hodman, could rise overnight from the depths of wretchedness to the summit of power, material well-being and notoriety. Civil war and its inevitable accompaniments, the destruction of property, the standstill of trade and industry, the disruption of the politico-social fabric and the demoralization of the people, were becoming the main elements of the situation with which the rising reformer had to cope.

Obregón, with his practical turn of mind, his familiarity with

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men and his quickness of intuition, discerned the chief elements of the Mexican problem and the only efficacious solution. This lay in focussing the physical strength of the nation and concentrating and directing it against the lawless *condottieri* who were the scourges of the people. But he also perceived the futility of restoring material order without creating at the same time a moral mainstay. And that he thus visualized the task and set to work to accomplish it, is one of his strongest claims to a high place among the world's latter day reformers. He was fired with enthusiasm for a group of politico-social ideals which he somewhat arbitrarily united under the vague term "morality," and which, without ceasing to be that, resolves itself into a veritable passion for justice and truth and a fierce love for order and progress. The sympathy or admiration which his personal presence almost always inspired he sought, not unsuccessfully, to turn towards his own praiseworthy purposes, and in this way he contrived to remould the habits of thinking and acting of many and to form that new type of citizen—soldiership being but a stepping-stone to that—upon which he afterwards relied for co-operation in his efforts at general reconstruction. And of the existence of that new type the foreigner has as yet hardly any conception.

The inner significance of Obregón's work could not be gauged aright by the outsider, nor, indeed, by the majority of his own countrymen, during a war which was the negation of morality.

"Do you assert," I once asked him, "that you differed essentially from your adversaries by conducting hostilities on moral lines?"

"Certainly not," he answered. "War can never be thus carried on because it is essentially immoral. It involves a temporary lapse into savagery. And that is why I am opposed to war on principle."

But even after hostilities had been concluded, the new movement was ignored, belittled or misunderstood, for Obregón soon laid down his command and rank and retired into private life, to emerge again as a branded rebel and candidate for outlawry. In this way it came to pass that the new doctrines and precepts which he preached and practised—owing to their almost imperceptible symptoms—crept into the country slowly and by stealth, being recognized for what they were only by a



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few and being set down even by them as partial and evanescent phenomena.

Like most generals in the field, Obregón has been accused of systematic and wanton cruelty, not only to the enemy, but also to the unarmed population, and as he has never belonged to any political party nor possessed a Press organ of his own, his accusers have had the public ear entirely to themselves. Now it would be a gross exaggeration to assert that even his process of selecting and educating his men was efficacious, that their passions never got the better of their reason, or that their methods of warfare differed essentially—as he intended them to differ—from those of their enemies. But, speaking generally, excesses against non-combatants were perpetrated at the risk of swift and Draconian punishment. That acts of unjustifiable cruelty were actually committed by Obregón's army seems highly probable *a priori* when one takes into account the character of many of the officers and soldiers under his command and the frenzy that possessed them after a hard-won victory and in expectation of treason ; and it appears certain *a posteriori* when one remembers the bitter resentment generated in the hearts of those elements of the population which at the time entertained scant sympathy for either side. The peaceful inhabitants included all the armies in one comprehensive anathema.

Circumstantial narratives of eye-witnesses are still current in the North, especially in the town of Gomez Palacio, describing the butchery of wounded prisoners in a hospital, and other barbarous atrocities perpetrated by the Carranzists, whose military chief was Obregón. But the source of most of the tales which acquired for that General at home and abroad the unenviable reputation of a ruthless soldier is Mexico City, which he captured and occupied not for the first time at the beginning of the year 1915. As I was not then in the capital, nothing that I can now advance by way of denial or confirmation of those charges possesses the slightest value as historic testimony, while the stories told by residents are so coloured, contradictory, and at times so obviously false, that their worth as contributions to the history of the civil war and to the biography of its distinguished leader is superlatively slight. One cannot reasonably assume, however, that there was so much smoke without any fire, or that Obregón's troops were angels of mercy.

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With his usual audacity he occupied the capital, after a laborious campaign with insufficient combatants to repel the attacks of the numerous Zapatist and other hostile forces in the environs, which were fierce, frequent and well sustained. His plight soon became almost desperate.

Inside, the smouldering animosities of the clergy, who regarded him as a sort of anti-Christ, and also the resentment of well-to-do business men and foreign investors who set him down as a socialist and leveller, were ready to burst into flame. On the very day of his entry into the city an organized attempt was made to assassinate him which, like so many similar perils through which he passed unscathed before and after, lent colour to the belief in the army that he bore a charmed life. He himself tells the story thus :

“When the entire column was already marching through the streets of the city, and just as I was passing in front of the Cathedral with the members of my general staff, and the escort from headquarters, a group of men began to open fire upon us from the towers of the temple, killing one of our soldiers and wounding another. I at once detached a posse with instructions to enter the church and capture the firing party, and this was effected without difficulty. The individuals caught confessed that they had been posted there with orders to fire upon me the moment I was passing in front of them.”

That was a challenge which he could not leave unanswered, and it was only one of many which he received later on.

Meantime, the Zapatists and other enemy troops were daily making tremendous onslaughts on his scanty army, sensibly reducing the number of his men, lessening his ammunition, which he was unable to replenish, and lowering the spirit of his troops by the ever-increasing tale of the dead, wounded and diseased. From every point of view his military position was precarious, and at times disheartening. The enemy kept him literally besieged in the capital, continually harassing him by well-directed attacks which, had they been properly co-ordinated by unity of command, might have annihilated his army and perhaps stamped out the revolutionary movement for a time. So close was the ring of fire drawn round him that he dared not extend his line so far as the village of Xochimilco in the outskirts of Mexico City. In a word, his hold on the capital, never

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firm from the outset, was gradually loosening and the prospect growing rapidly darker.

To the cares which the military outlook generated, others possibly more disquieting still were added by the urban population, many of the elements of which were openly hostile or covertly disaffected to the revolutionary leader, whose retaliatory measures were dreaded even more than the ulterior realization of his radical theories. It was natural, therefore, that the clergy, pious Catholics, prosperous Mexican and foreign merchants and capitalists with vested interests, should prefer Huerta to the champion of a subversive movement whose name was associated by wild rumour and deliberate spite with tales of horrible cruelty and murderous vengeance. The desperation and enmity engendered by these beliefs and apprehensions might at any moment assume destructive forms, and ruin the enterprise to which Obregón was devoting his life—and Obregón was not the man to give them scope for development.

The measures he adopted to exorcise the danger were undoubtedly drastic. The circumstance that he himself and his personal friends considered that they needed explanation is itself an indication that there was a consuming fire where so much smoke thickened the air. But as he himself puts it :

“ War is savagery broken loose, and if civilization is to endure, war must be eliminated as a measure for composing international quarrels and harmonizing international interests.”

The only element in the city which was frankly in favour of the revolutionary leader was that of the lack-alls, who welcomed in him their saviour. It is needless to remark that their expectations were as wild as their demands. Meanwhile their condition was desperate. Hunger and disease were making havoc among them, and if they could only be sufficiently exasperated by the continuance of these hardships, it was on the cards that they, too, might be converted into open enemies. That, at any rate, was believed by General Obregón and his staff to be at once the hope and the aim of the reactionaries, and certain acts of theirs—which may or may not have been inspired by this desire, for they are known to recur in all places and times in such crises—lent colour to the suspicion. Obregón himself alludes to this matter as follows :

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"From the moment when I first occupied the City of Mexico I became aware of the prevalence of a marked hostility towards the Constitutionalist army on the part of the clergy, the big houses of commerce, bankers, wealthy industrials and the bulk of foreigners. This hostility assumed the form of opposition to the execution of the measures emanating from headquarters, or communicated by myself in concert with the chief of the Constitutionalist Army. I sincerely believe that this opposition, at any rate in most cases, was less the outcome of conviction than of expediency, for the elements in question could not get it into their heads that our army, so reduced in numbers and so lacking in munitions, would be able to withstand the hosts of Villa and Zapata, which they had seen marching past in the capital. Those forces were five times more numerous than ours. It was, therefore, natural to assume that our army would shortly be wiped out; that Villa the invincible warrior, and Angeles the brand-new military chief, would, after having annihilated us, treat the citizens who had given in to us with more or less rigour. Consequently, the main object of the latter in striking out this line of conduct towards us was to further their own interests. Mexico City was in an alarming state of misery. All primary necessities were in the hands of men who accumulated and concealed them, and the public was the victim of this immoral monopolization."

This distress was intensified by a measure which Carranza and Obregón decided to take, and which was practised consistently on both sides in the civil war. All the paper money—and it amounted to an enormous sum—issued by the Government of the convention and by Villa was declared worthless on the ground that it would be a crushing burden to the nation. The consequence of this repudiation to the hapless individuals whose worldly wealth was represented by these notes can better be imagined than described. Obregón sought to alleviate the wretchedness of the population by creating a committee of public assistance, to which he donated half a million pesos—about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

"The attacks of the enemy," he writes, "now became general. Our ammunition was being consumed in greater quantities than we had the means to renew. Hunger had its grip on our poor classes; and in concert with these misfortunes, the privileged castes—as I call them sarcastically in

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my work, though their proper appellation should be accursed castes—headed by the clergy and antagonistic to the revolution, raised prices, concealed the necessities of life, and spread rumours of an alarming character about Villa's approach at the head of vast bodies of troops to seize the capital, and nullify, on triumphing, our paper money. The profiteers thereupon closed their doors to the retail trade, and the streets began to be filled with large groups of hungry humans, whose pinched faces bore marks of protracted fasting. Most of the foreigners had recourse to their diplomatic representatives, to whom they complained of the situation, which they had not raised a finger to alleviate, whereupon all the maledictions of the people I have described were showered on my head. General Obregón stood before the eyes of those folk in the guise of a monster of evil, a monster of heresy and a monster of untameable ferocity.

"Thus the hour was striking when I had to choose between two alternatives—to withstand all the enemies of the revolution, or, yielding to the pressure of those perverse influences, to confess myself beaten. The former a thousand times sooner than the latter was my decision. And in the depths of my conscience I swore by my honour as a man to fling down the glove, and deal with those enemies as their attitude merited. After that I deemed it indispensable to adopt measures so radically energetic, that they would leave no doubt as to my determination to tread under foot all their material interests, all their influence, and all their pressure in defence of the dignity of our cause and of the moral interests for which we stood."

Such is General Obregón's own defence. It speaks for itself. Enemies as well as friends will draw from it proofs of their respective theories. The disinterested historian will set it down as a confession and an explanation—and that is the best the biographer can say of it.

That the measures framed by the General were, in truth, radically drastic will not be denied. There is no question that the clergy were treated with unnecessary and, I fear, unjustifiable harshness, and there is little question that the well-to-do classes saw not only their material interests trodden under foot, but in some cases their persons subjected to treatment which even the rigours of a civil war could hardly justify. A

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contribution of half a million pesos was imposed on the ecclesiastical body, one hundred and eighty members of which were taken prisoners, and compelled later on, in consequence of their refusal to pay the contribution, to march to Veracruz with Obregón's forces when these evacuated the city. Heavy contributions were also levied on the moneyed classes in the shape of a tax on capital, a tax on mortgages, a tax on immovable property, a tax on trades and professions, and so on. And as the money was not forthcoming by the time Obregón evacuated the city, the arrested merchants were likewise condemned to accompany the troops to Veracruz, whereupon they paid their respective quotas and were set at liberty.

As foreigners were included among the classes mulcted by Obregón in Mexico City, their diplomatic representatives were up and doing. The Government of the United States, as one of the most closely interested, took prompt cognizance of the complaint of its citizens, though foreigners had meanwhile been exempted from the contributions; and it addressed a sharp note through the Brazilian Legation to the General, informing him that his public utterances tended to "incite the populace to commit outrages in which innocent foreigners . . . could be involved. . . ." And adding:

"When a factional leader plays upon a starving city to compel obedience to his decrees by inciting outrages, and at the same time uses means to prevent the city from being supplied with food, a situation is created which it is impossible for the United States to contemplate longer with patience. . . . The Government of the United States, therefore, desires Generals Obregón and Carranza to know that it . . . will hold Generals Obregón and Carranza personally responsible. . . ."

Obregón's answer was to the effect that the Note received being of an international character, it lay outside his functions to answer it, but that he would refer it to General Carranza, who would doubtless take due cognizance of its contents. At the same time, he addressed a telegram to Carranza, denying specifically and emphatically the charges preferred against him in the United States Note, and censuring the attitude of the majority of the foreigners and well-to-do Mexicans as unworthy of human beings.

Among the specific charges made against Obregón is the sacking of the Church of Santa Brigida by the mob while he

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was in command of the city ; and also that when in the capital, to the soldiers who had complained that they had nothing to eat, he had said, pointing in the direction of the shops : “ What ! Nothing to eat with the shops full of provisions ? Be off and eat your fill ! ” The accusation is *a priori* most unlikely, for it runs counter to his known maxims. He himself denies it credibly and with emphasis.

“ What,” he asked me, “ would have become of army discipline if I had ordered, or even allowed, my troops to run amok ? What I did was simple. I had the necessary provisions collected in an orderly way and distributed to my troops. Any man caught plundering would be punished as a deterrent example to his comrades.”

There exists documentary evidence of Obregón’s real attitude on this subject, and it tallies with his telegram to Carranza. He issued and had posted upon the City walls the following order regulating the behaviour of his troops :

“ With a view to the efficacious maintenance of public order, on the occupation of Mexico City by the forces under my command, I hereby ordain :

- “ 1. That anyone who shall attempt to disturb the public order by outrages, robbery, or other criminal acts, will be shot without any procedure other than the identification of the delinquent.
- “ 2. The same punishment will be inflicted on that chief or officer who, swerving from the line of duty, shall permit his subalterns to commit unlawful acts of any kind whatever.
- “ 3. As these headquarters are disposed to offer every kind of security and guarantee, all persons who have grounds for complaint are hereby requested to lay them before headquarters immediately after the commission of any act complained of.
- “ 4. The sale of alcoholic liquors is absolutely forbidden so long as headquarters deem it necessary. Therefore, taverns and liquor shops must remain closed to the public until further orders.”

Emanating from a disciplinarian like Obregón, those words were real deterrents, not mere threats, to be set aside in favour of this man or that. And every officer knew it. That docu-

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ment, it may be objected, is at most proof of good intentions and of the drastic measures devised to carry them out; but it leaves the question whether those measures were effective to be settled by the balance of evidence. And there is force in the objection. It is obvious and worth remembering, however, that in revolutionary epochs, when the success of a cause and the life of a leader are trembling in the scales, and both depend upon the energy and the daring of that leader, it is vain to expect him to deal out blows by measure, and it would be unfair to estimate his excesses by the canons of normal times.

The process of weeding out, which was continuous, and never superfluous, appears to have had good results, enabling the author to rally round him a nucleus of loyal, resolute and conscientious officers. I am personally acquainted with many of these, and the impression which some of them made upon me was wholly different from that which the average Mexican General produces. What struck me about them was their sense of responsibility and their eagerness to carry out the General's orders in the spirit as well as in the letter. They may not be paragons of intelligence, but one and all they have been trained to look upon themselves as organs, and as such to obey their head. Obregón, like the great Russian statesman Count Witte, was accustomed on critical occasions to listen attentively to the views of his subordinates as to the course of action to be pursued. But once his decision taken, whether or no their opinions had been discussed or even heard, it had to be followed at all costs. To swerve deliberately from the line traced by the chief was in a battle to merit death, and would on the march be to forfeit his confidence.

In the rapid survey of the life of a great revolutionary chief, to attempt to apportion blame and censure is a task at once invidious and fruitless. Obregón is one of those leaders of men whose personality is a living force undergoing a continuous process of refinement, learning and unlearning, widening his vision, deepening his feeling for human progress, focussing more and more of the hopes and aspirations of his countrymen, and adjusting with increasing nicety his own conceptions to the loftiest tendencies of the age. To set forth the various stages in this process and to describe the central facts of Obregón's life-story, which reveal his feelings for the



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course of human advancement and his concrete relations towards his country and the world at large, is the task of the biographer. That such a kneader of men, who has become a powerful agency in his country and his epoch, should occasionally fail to keep the balance even between impulse and reason, promise and achievement, is natural and inevitable. Moreover, the defects of unusual strength invariably transcend those of cautious mediocrity. In any case, it is idle to dwell on shortcomings, and to disparage positive achievements because the social faith of the man to whose credit they stand did not always remove mountains. The reader, if in need of moral labels, can devise them to suit himself.

## CHAPTER IX

### DRAMATIC EPISODES

THE military successes of Obregón, Villa and their colleagues on the one hand, and the auxiliary action of President Wilson on the other, brought the Constitutionalist party within sight and reach of their goal. Carranza had become the official representative of the revolutionists, with the title of First Chief, while Obregón had been promoted to be Commander-in-Chief of the division of the North-West. After the fall of Zacatecas,\* the usurper Huerta was forced to resign, and permitted to seek retirement abroad, where he was soon summoned to his last account. His successor,† failing to obtain recognition in Mexico or the United States, reluctantly abandoned the capital and vanished into obscurity, whereupon Obregón's troops occupied Mexico City.

The Constitutionalist party included leaders of various political creeds and many personal ambitions. One of the most earnest of these chiefs was Emiliano Zapata, an Indian, who enjoyed great influence in his own State of Morelos, and stood for the restitution to its inhabitants of the vast stretches of land of which they had been criminally dispossessed. The entire State of Morelos was owned by about twenty-three or four individuals, many of them Spanish immigrants, while the Indians who had tilled the soil for generations were despoiled of everything but their house lots in the towns. And Zapata was for breaking up the great landed estates of the former and redistributing them among the latter. He thus formed his programme out of a single one of the many Mexican problems. Villa, as yet, like Obregón, only a military commander, had not identified himself with any political aim

\* In July, 1914.

† Carbajal.

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beyond that of the Constitutionalist party which was supposed to be the restoration of the constitution violated by Huerta. Villa was popular with Americans and willing to follow their lead. And Carranza, taciturn and solemn, now began tentatively to develop the far-reaching plans over which he had long been brooding. He and Villa stood out as the chief candidates for the Presidency, and their patriotic proposals and counter-proposals, which included a self-denying ordinance in virtue of which they should both abandon all claims to power, were hardly more than preliminary feints in the coming struggle. Villa, for example, together with Obregón and some other members, made a suggestion which on the face of it promised peace and won approval. It was that Carranza should become the Provisional Head of the Republic, should then call elections for the Congress, which would examine amendments to the Constitution, and that neither the Provisional President, nor any revolutionary General, nor State governor should be eligible for office. Carranza rejected this plan, threw a slur on those from whom it had emanated, and when a neutral individual was chosen Provisional President,\* refused to recognize his authority.

This play at cross-purposes produced a schism in the party. Villa constituted himself President of the Republic, and appointed three Ministers, while Carranza, quitting the capital, proclaimed himself the depositary of supreme and exceptional powers, and in lieu of summoning a representative body, declared a sort of interregnum of legality during which no bounds should be set to his authority, and no claims should be allowed for injuries sustained at the hands of himself or his agents. In short, he revealed himself as Dictator. The capital changed masters four times within three months. The United States Government sent remonstrances to Obregón, and finally called a meeting of Central American and other States to consider the problem of government in Mexico. In short, the Republic was once more in the trough of the sea.

Carranza had Generals Obregón and Pablo Gonzalez as the military champions of his cause, which was promptly strengthened by the official recognition of his Administration by the

\* General Eulalio Gutierrez. He was deposed by the Convention early in the following year.

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United States.\* But with Villa fighting against him, and Zapata's peripatetic bands stirring up rebellions in various parts of the country, he was still merely a ruler *in partibus infidelium*, and his main hope lay in the successful issue of the forthcoming duel between Generals Villa and Obregón, both unbeaten in the field.

These two men had met before under dramatic circumstances never to be forgotten by either. To Obregón that meeting was the fiercest ordeal of his existence. To Villa it was a lost opportunity and the turning-point in his career. If nothing more were known of the biography of either, the characters of both would still detach themselves from the narratives in statuesque relief. The incident is perhaps the most interesting, as it is also the most characteristic, in the life-story of those two adversaries. The meeting in question had come about in this way.

In the days when Obregón was sifting his improvised army and removing the wheat from the tares, he had occasion to dispense with the services of two officers, named respectively Cañado and Dr. Felipe Dussart, for conduct alleged to have been unworthy of army men. The disgrace rankled in the hearts of the two dishonoured individuals, who thereupon went over to the hostile forces, nursed their grudges, and bode their time. Later on, when the fortune of war had seemingly placed Obregón beyond their reach, his evil genius played him an insidious trick, and appeared about to give them the revenge they yearned for. It happened in a curious way.

Carranza convened all State governors and military commanders to foregather in Mexico City† for the purpose of recommending reforms, drafting a programme for the Provisional Government and fixing the date of the elections. Villa, who was all-powerful in the State of Chihuahua, declined to appear, and suggested that Carranza should take office as Provisional President, arrange for the elections within a month's time, and be himself ineligible for election to the post of Chief of the Republic. Carranza scouted the proposal, and

\* Recognition was given *de facto* on October 6th, 1915, and *de jure* on March 3rd, 1917, a few weeks after the promulgation of the famous Constitution of 1917 to which the United States Government now takes exception.

† On September 4th, 1914. The meeting was fixed for October 1st.

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a split appeared imminent. Obregón, eager for peace and union, offered his good offices to Carranza. He would set out for Chihuahua, seek to win over Villa, and, if possible, bring him to the capital.

"But you are joking," a friend exclaimed. "Surely you would not venture into the lion's den?"

"Well, I am off there at once if Carranza accepts me as peacemaker," was the reply. "After all, hospitality has its laws, and even lawlessness has its limits."

Carranza closed with the offer, and Obregón started for Chihuahua, accompanied by a few comrades. On his way northward he received urgent telegrams from friends and well-wishers beseeching or advising him to return before venturing into Villa's power, as otherwise he would surely be murdered. But having once made up his mind, his resolve was not to be shaken.

On their arrival, Obregón and his comrades were received with open arms and ejaculations of joy by Villa, who ordered a ball to be given to the welcome guests on the following day, and meanwhile rejoicings were universal.

On the morrow, after lunch, Villa sent his chauffeur with a motor to take Obregón to his own residence, where they could have a quiet friendly talk together. Obregón entered the apartment turning over in his mind the arguments that might have most weight with his host. Hardly had he crossed the threshold, however, when Villa jumped up and shouted:

"General Hill fancies he can play with me, does he? Well, I'll teach him better. You are a vile traitor, and I am going to have you shot at once. At once, do you hear?" And turning to his secretary, he exclaimed: "Telephone immediately to Cañado, and tell him to bring a platoon of twenty men to shoot this traitor."

"I will telephone at once, General."

Cañado was one of the two officers whom Obregón had branded with the mark of dishonour, and now unexpectedly he was about to have his lust for vengeance gratified to the full. On his arrival the execution was to take place.

Obregón was petrified. In vain he racked his mind to find a clue to the riddle. What had happened to transform thus suddenly the amiable host of yesterday into the murderer of to-day?

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This is what had occurred. Carranza had telegraphed an angry message to Villa, which rendered hopeless the understanding that Obregón was come to arrange. And not satisfied with this, he had given orders which, if carried out, would have sealed Obregón's doom in the improbable event of his escape from death at Villa's hand in Chihuahua. He dispatched a message to Natera, ordering him to destroy the railway over which alone his envoy could make good his flight.\*

Unaware of these curious moves, Obregón maintained his presence of mind and serenity of countenance. Addressing Villa, he said: "Ever since I first placed my life at the service of the Revolution, I have held that to lose it for that cause would be a piece of good luck." This remark was received in silence.

It was a dramatic moment. The two Generals eyed each other, the one waiting for death, the other making up his mind to snuff out one more life—this time a life the loss of which would leave a great void in the Republic and produce far ranging changes in its destinies. There seemed no way of escape for Obregón, who was standing up in the room mentally preparing for the end. For he had no reason to believe that he would get away with his life. But he could not picture to himself how that end would come. For, being acquainted with the workings of his captor's mind, he was expecting every minute that Villa, who was visibly waxing impatient, would not wait until Cañado and his escort arrived, but would whip out his revolver and blow out his prisoner's brains without more ado. That was Villa's way.

On the other hand, Obregón deftly touched the only chord that could possibly attune his treacherous host—if anything could—to a less murderous frame of mind. He himself outlines the scene as follows:

"During the few minutes while I was replying to Villa's threat and while I was perhaps in danger of being assassinated by himself—as so many people had been assassinated by him before—there entered into the adjoining room a certain so-called General, Dr. Felipe Dussart, an individual whom I had expelled from our ranks in Sonora as unworthy to belong to the Constitutionalist army. This person made a sign to

\* The line between Zacatecas and Torreon over which Obregón ultimately escaped.

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Villa and began to applaud him, leaping, by way of displaying his delight at my approaching execution, and exclaiming :

“ ‘Bravo, bravo, General! That’s the way to do business.’

“ Villa’s feelings at the exhibition given by this contemptible being, who was thus celebrating my death, were such that he turned all the vials of his wrath against him, exclaiming : ‘Get out of this, you scoundrel! Away, you blackguard, or I will kick you out!’

“ While this farce was being enacted by the two I continued walking to and fro in the apartment. As soon as Dussart was ejected from the room I turned to Villa, and he and I kept striding backward and forward in the chamber. The fury of the man was sensibly depriving him of the control of his nerves, and he was constantly making convulsive movements which betokened his excitement.

“ The only wedge I could hope to drive into Villa’s mind was the idea—and I strove to hammer it into him—that he would be conferring a service upon me by murdering me ; and with that object in view, whenever he reiterated the words : ‘This time I am going to shoot you dead,’ I kept on replying : ‘On me personally you are bestowing a benefit, for this kind of death will give me an importance to which at present I have no claim, and the only loser will be yourself. The only happy people are those who have met death in a good cause, if only they knew it.’

“ By this time the escort had come. My officers were being detained in the chamber which had been prepared for me as a bedroom. Nothing was now lacking but the fatal word from Villa. He, however, continued to pace the room by my side. All at once he swerved from me and darted towards the interior of the house. The moments were slipping by and our situation remained unchanged.

“ When everything was at last ready for our execution a special agent of the United States of America, Mr. Canova, appeared, doubtless for the purpose of interviewing Villa ; but he was compelled to go back without seeing him, because he was not allowed to pass the threshold of the house.

“ The news of the order for our execution had in the meanwhile spread throughout the city, and groups of quidnuncs were gathering round Villa’s house to witness the spectacle. One

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hour had elapsed when Villa ordered the escort to return, and relieved the guard at the door.

"It was about twenty minutes past six when he came into the room, sat down and invited me to be seated beside him. Never before was I so ready to accept an invitation. I at once took my seat on the sofa to which he had motioned me. With signs of deep emotion which everyone would have taken to be real, and in a tone of compunction, Villa addressed me thus :

" ' Francisco Villa is not a traitor. He is not the man to kill unarmed people, and least of all to kill you, comrade, who are my guest. If you had come to this place with troops a good deal of powder and ball would have passed between us. But as you have come alone you have no ground for misgivings. The destinies of the Republic are in your hands and mine. United, you and I would dominate the country in less than a twinkling, and as I am a grey, obscure, uneducated man, it is you who will be the President.'

"My situation had become delicate. All I said to him was : ' The contest is over now. We need not give our thoughts to war any more. At the next election that man will rise to the top who has acquired the sympathies of the majority.'

"Villa's feigned emotion waxed ever greater until his voice was choked with sobs. Thereupon a dead silence ensued, lasting for a considerable time. It was at length broken by the arrival of a lad, who suddenly stalked into the room and cried : ' Supper is ready.'

"Villa rose, dried his tears, turned to me and said : ' Come and have supper, dear comrade, now that everything is over and done with.'

"I confess that I did not believe his assurance that all was over and done with."\*

The two men and Villa's wife then broke bread together. It was an extraordinary repast. When it was over the host, pleading indisposition, retired, and did not appear at the festivities. Obregón, in whose honour the ball was given, went and danced until the small hours of the morning.

That was the end of the first act. The second is still more curious.

\* "Ocho Mil Kilómetros en Campaña," p. 266.



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Obregón sent Major Madero to apprise General Hill of what was happening, and to warn him not to heed any orders issued from Chihuahua in Obregón's name. At the same time he transmitted 20,000 pesos to be distributed among the families of the members of his staff if they should be assassinated together with himself by Villa. Immediately after receiving forged instructions purporting to have been signed and dispatched by Obregón, Hill sent a reply, showing that he recognized the fraud, to Villa, whose wrath transformed him into a veritable madman. But nothing sensational resulted.

The Consul of the United States of America next called on Obregón to inform him that he had induced Villa to set him free and send him to Ciudad Juarez, and thence to the United States. Obregón replied thanking the Consul for his friendly efforts and Villa for his permission, but refusing to seek protection under a foreign flag.

"If I am a highwayman or a traitor, it is meet that I should be executed here in Chihuahua, but if I am neither I should be released and allowed to return to Mexico City to render an account of the mission entrusted to me by the First Chief."

To that suggestion Villa finally assented, and agreed to dispatch his guest to the capital, accompanied by two Villist generals who had a fair amount of common sense, were devoid of fanaticism, and were therefore able to gauge aright the character of their chief, of whom they both stood in awe. On reaching the station at Caballos they entered Obregón's drawing room and, pointing to a slip of paper with doleful mien, said: "Look at the telegraphic message that has just been handed to us." Obregón took the paper and read: "Please return immediately, taking General Obregón with you." As the General remarked: "Without being a prophet it was obvious what my fate was now going to be." He again made ready for the end.

The two Villist generals sat down in the compartment of the train opposite their prisoner—for the telegram had made him that—and the silence that ensued was unbroken for a few minutes. Then one of them\* addressed him: "Let us know how we can be of service to you and we are at your orders. You may rely on us."

\* General Robles.

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Obregón, more solicitous about their situation than his own, answered simply : " I appreciate your offer, which I accept with gratitude. All that I ask is your word of honour that you will save me from insult and outrages, and that if Villa orders me to be shot on my arrival in Chihuahua, as I believe he will, you will see that I am not insulted nor outraged, and you will also see that my execution is not accompanied by humiliating details."

The two generals, rising to their feet, swore that they would not allow any outrage or insult to be put upon him at his execution. Thereupon the train started back to what seemed certain to be Obregón's last station upon earth.

The two generals were sincerely sorry for their prisoner. They assured him that if he were doomed to die at Chihuahua they would abandon Villa and themselves attack his forces in Torreon. When approaching their destination Obregón handed a valise with 30,000 pesos to an American journalist, asking him to deliver it to the commercial agent of the U.S. Government, as it was money belonging to the Mexican nation. They reached Chihuahua at night, and the next morning at seven o'clock Villa's motor drove up to convey them to his house. Obregón's feelings may well be imagined. His behaviour cannot but be admired. Actuated by a sense of personal dignity, civic courage and loyalty, it manifested itself in transparent sincerity, fine tact and indifference to the consequences of duty fulfilled.

In a distraught state of mind Villa received his unwilling guests. He had just had a sharp telegraphic conversation with Carranza, which ended in his refusal to recognize the authority of that hated man, and his excitement consequent on this fateful resolve deprived him of all self-control. He could hardly speak. He would now raise his voice to the pitch of a shrill scream and now lower it to a scarcely audible whisper or hiss. He told Obregón scores of times during the day that he and his companions must and would be shot forthwith, and it is probable that he would have carried out his intention had he not been moved by the suasion and opposition of the majority of his own generals. But two of these men, who exerted a certain influence over Villa, left no stone unturned to induce him to put to death the one man who represented a real and formidable obstacle to the development of his plans.

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"Now is your chance," they told him; "it may never return. Utilize it."\*

The two Villist generals who had escorted Obregón in the train behaved well. They besought their chief to allow his guest to return with them, but he always curtly refused, and lest they should importune him further he sent them to Torreon. On receiving this command they both approached him and stated that they would obey it on condition that he would not take Obregón's life, and they departed as soon as he had expressly accepted it. But Villa's promises always left him free to follow his whims.

During all this period of suspense host and guest took their meals together. After supper Villa, turning to Obregón, said: "This very night I am going to send you back to Carranza. I am only waiting for Almanza's train to go ahead."

Obregón, who has an extraordinarily clear insight into motives and occasionally a wonderful presentiment which borders on prescience, felt that a plot was being hatched in which Almanza's trains were to play a part—a plot which would enable Villa to keep the letter of his promise to his two generals—not to condemn Obregón to death—and yet to "put him out of the way effectually." Accordingly, before starting he contrived to have a talk with the brother of one of his two protectors.† This man told him that he was about to abandon Villa definitively, and stated further that Villa's ambitions had been aroused and sustained by Felipe Angeles.

Now Villa had a devoted servant, an *âme damnée*, in the person of a certain Colonel Rodolfo L. Fierros, whom he deputed to superintend all the arrangements of the train journey. This detail confirmed Obregón's suspicions that he was falling from the gridiron into the fire, escaping formal execution by Villa's ~~open~~ sentence, and about to be assassinated outright on the way.

"Everything is ready now for your departure," explained Villa, at ten o'clock at night; whereupon Obregón took his leave and departed, together with Colonel R. G. Garza, one of the Villist generals who had steadily opposed his execution. The leave-taking was grimly courteous.

\* One (Maytorena) was with Villa in the house. The others sent him telegrams.

† Luis Benavides.

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The danger to the life of Obregón and his associates now appeared to be conjured, and yet he himself, knowing the kind of man Villa was, had little doubt what was in store for him. If he had only known the truth, his chances of coming out of the ordeal alive were as one to nine hundred and ninety-nine. For Villa's plan to have him and his comrades murdered on the way was so thoroughly well conceived that practically nothing was left to chance. The miscreant had not allowed the group of Obregónists to quit Chihuahua until he had dispatched ahead of them a military train under General Almanza's command. And Almanza's instructions were to await Obregón and his officers, who were due on the following morning, and to put them all to death. Looked at, therefore, from the point of view of probabilities, Obregón's chance of escape was nil. For the states of Chihuahua and Durango, through which they were about to travel, were ruled by Villa with a rod of iron. His will was law to all the authorities there, military and civil.

But the best laid plans are sometimes frustrated by unforeseen trifles, and that is what happened here. Almanza's train had to halt on the way in order to allow the engine to be repaired. While this was being done Almanza went to bed. In the meanwhile Obregón's train caught up on his, and passed it without exciting comment, for Almanza had initiated none of his companions into his secret. When day broke Almanza ordered his train, which had by this time started afresh, to be brought to a standstill, without informing anyone of his intentions.

But after having waited in vain for Obregón's arrival, he ordered a railway official to inquire into the cause of the delay. The answer was that the train had already passed through in the early hours of the morning. This was a stunning blow to the would-be executioner, who forthwith telegraphed to his chief, asking him to order Obregón's train to return, so that he might carry out his secret instructions. This order was duly telegraphed, and it reached the station Corralitos, where a number of persons, some of whom were opposed to the contemplated murders, took cognizance of it, and also took such steps as were feasible to baulk the project. Two of them\* telegraphed to Villa, entreating him not to

\* L. A. Benavides and E. P. Rul.

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perpetrate the crime he meditated. Villa replied, tranquillizing them all.

"Have no fear," he answered. "Obregón's train will be allowed to continue its journey and all will be well." And he once more telegraphed that it should be allowed to move on to Torreon. But at the same time he dispatched the following secret message to the military commander of the town of Gomez Palacio: "As soon as General Obregón's special train passes, have him arrested, together with all the persons who accompany him, and have them shot without delay. Having accomplished this, you shall report to general headquarters here on the event."

Fortunately these sanguinary plans came to the knowledge of Generals Robles and A. Benavides, who, indignant at the flagrant violation of Villa's solemn promise to spare Obregón's life, took the unusual and perilous step of dispatching a special train to meet Obregón at Gomez Palacio\* and convey him to Torreon.

In the meanwhile, Obregón was undergoing the most cruel suspense, expecting death at any moment, but more solicitous about the fate of his companions and his own good name than about his life, which was not worth one hour's purchase. The first part of his further progress was uneventful enough. On reaching Corralitos, however, things changed in a twinkling. That little station, situated in a parched desert of Chihuahua, contained but one railway official, who also attended to the telegraphic work. This employee communicated Villa's message already alluded to, that the train must return to Chihuahua. As soon as it started, however, on the return journey, Obregón leaped from his car to the ground.

Colonel Garza, in whose charge he was, followed his example, and asked him: "What are you going to do, General?"

"To die fighting," was the response. Thereupon the train was stopped, and down leaped Captain Robinson, the officer in command of Obregón's fifteen men, who said: "We will all share the same fate, General. I am going to bring out our escort."

Now Obregón was aware that General Almanza's train was fast drawing near, and that he had strict orders not to allow any of the party to get away with his life. Consequently

\* A town beside that of Torreon.

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there was no time to be lost. Colonel Garza, to whom Villa had confided Obregón's party, was utterly disgusted with his chief's behaviour. Still, he considered that it would be best for Obregón to resign himself to the order and return to Chihuahua. But Obregón's companions were already standing on the ground ready to execute the commands of Captain Robinson.

Obregón, however, had definitively made up his mind, and, turning to Robinson, said: "Join your escort and do your utmost to save my officers. As for myself, you shall leave me here, accompanied only by my adjutant Valdez." And, addressing Valdez, he said: "Bring me my carbine and take your own."

But Robinson and his men protested. They were bent, they said, on sharing the fate of their beloved chief, and they refused to leave him in the hands of his enemies.

Obregón, however, was not to be moved. He said: "I want you to go to the bottom of this matter. The essence of it is this: We must avoid everything that would afford a pretext to the enemy for assassinating us. If we offer armed resistance, as you desire, we shall certainly do considerable execution to the enemy's ranks, but then they will be able to expose the bodies of their dead in Chihuahua, to calumniate us by alleging that we attacked their train and that they acted merely in legitimate self-defence. On the other hand, Valdez and I, without you, stand a better chance of saving our lives, because it is much harder to capture two men than a group. And if they catch and murder me, they will have no justification—not even a pretext."

Obregón then ordered them to cut the telegraph wires and to arrest the telegraphist. Now if this plan had been carried out, and it was on the very point of being executed, Obregón and his companions were doomed. For flight through a desert of Chihuahua would have been almost tantamount to death by thirst, hunger and fatigue, and if they should manage to reach a town or village, the enemy's soldiers would not fail to apprehend them.

But once more Obregón's luck extricated him from the net in which he was seemingly caught. Just as the escort entered the telegraph office to arrest the telegraphist, he was taking a message from Villa, ordering Obregón's train to proceed to

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Torreón. Thereupon the whole party re-entered their respective cars, not, indeed, with any feeling of security, but with a painful curiosity to learn or divine what fresh scheme of murder Villa had woven. But they were all in the dark as to details, including Colonel Garza, who was acting for Villa.

As the reader already knows, the plan was that the military governor of Gomez Palacio should arrest Obregón there and have him and his companions shot at once.

As the train was drawing near Gomez Palacio, one of the officers informed Obregón that a train was advancing towards them in the distance. Once more the nerves of the little band were on edge, and the all-important question became pressing, what attitude should they take? Suddenly both trains slowed down and halted at a distance of some hundred yards from each other, and it became known at once that the train in front had been sent from Torreón by Generals Benavides and Robles and that two officers on board carried a safe conduct for the party. Obregón had won the sympathy of his enemy's officers so completely that they abandoned Villa and risked their lives to save him.

Such was the end of this thrilling adventure, which had brought Obregón and his friends so near to the jaws of death that the newspapers of the capital, with that intelligent anticipation which characterizes them, published accounts of their having been shot.

This melodrama of vengeance and hysteria had an interesting epilogue, of which I was myself a witness. The scene was Merida, the capital of Yucatan, and the time was September 8th, 1920. General Obregón, then a candidate for the presidency, was visiting the Southern and Eastern States of the Republic, and I was accompanying him as a friend. The Socialist party of Yucatan had invited him one evening to dinner in the Centenary Park of that city. As I arrived late, instead of being, as usual, near the President-elect, I sat about five yards from him. Near me was a man whose peculiar physiognomy arrested my attention. He was restless and nervous—a soul in pain. He cast furtive glances now and again towards the guest of the evening. After the first toast had been drunk to the health of the General, in a speech in which Socialism and its enemies were the main theme, General Obregón delivered a masterly reply.

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At that time the tide of political passion rose high in Yucatan and the flames of party fanaticism blazed fiercely everywhere. Crime was common and lawlessness universal. A day or two previously an orator had delivered an incendiary discourse and asked for the heads of all the burghers, and when the General inquired whether he had been authorized to speak in the name of the party—and if not, what steps would be taken by the Council—he was disavowed and deprived of his post.

At the banquet the General spoke of the necessity of moderation and measure, in the interests of the country, to which all mere party aims ought to be subordinated, and of the danger of admitting into the party professional agitators and individuals whose antecedents disqualified them for membership. At this, the guest whose changeful features I had been watching from time to time was growing more and more uneasy. After this ominous exordium the General went on to say that the party had admitted a man thus disqualified, a man who had betrayed the cause of the revolution, had changed sides, and leaped with delight when the rebel Villa had treacherously seized him, Obregón, and condemned him to be shot offhand. Then the bomb fell.

“That individual is at this moment sitting here at this convivial board among us,” he remarked, “as your guest and comrade.”

Cries of “Name! Name!” interrupted the orator, and among those who uplifted their voices in this outcry was the agitated individual near me, who was the person denounced.

Obregón replied that vindictiveness was not among his defects; that all he asked from the party was circumspection in choosing their members and their spokesmen, not the punishment of traitors.

A day later the newspapers in Merida contained a letter from Dr. Felipe Dussart, stating that the person alluded to in the historic speech was himself; explaining that his action in Villa’s house had been misconstrued; asserting that his aim had been to save Obregón’s life, and announcing that he would now go into voluntary exile from his country. Thus he chastised himself for his good intentions!

Such was the end of that episode.



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Like most men who have played a noteworthy part in Mexican history, Obregón is a believer in that mysterious force which makes and mars so many enterprises and their authors, and is variously known as circumstance, fate, luck and Providence. Throughout his life he has been what is commonly termed lucky. As a young man he had often played games of hazard, and was almost always a winner. In fact, in bygone days he had such frequent and continuous runs of luck in a Casino in the North that the proprietor offered to pay him a fee in return for an undertaking to abstain from playing. Unlike some of Europe's famous statesmen, he is not addicted to chess, but the Yankee game of poker, now as popular throughout the world as the jazz and the fox-trot, has for years been one of his favourite pastimes, and he is reputed to be a past-master in the game.

In other respects he was equally fortunate. Over and over again he has escaped perils and survived mishaps which proved fatal to those who shared them with himself, and has extricated himself from traps into which he had stumbled with a degree of ingenuity combined with luck which amazed his friends and enemies. In the field where fate seems blind he had many hairbreadth escapes, as, for instance, one on the Isle de Pedra, in the Pacific, where a shell fell in the centre of a group with whom he was holding converse and hurled him several yards away. But every survivor of a long war can match these experiences with others equally marvellous.

Far more thrilling was an episode which marked the most critical day of the long revolutionary campaign, when the light of his lucky star seemed extinguished for ever. It took place while he was struggling with Villa for the mastery, and, as usual, with want of materials for the struggle.\* Obregón had been ubiquitous over the field all day, inspiring his men, giving orders and watching the vicissitudes of the combat. At last he went to the top of a tower on an estate known as Hacienda Santa Ana, to survey the enemy's movements. Villa was bringing up his artillery towards the *hacienda*, and Obregón, who had none at all, decided to send his cavalry to hinder the advance. Having issued the requisite orders, he came down from the tower, together with a group of young

\* It is generally known as the battle of Leon y Trinidad. The date is the 3rd June, 1915. I have been over the battlefield.

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generals, and was within sixty yards of the trenches when the first grenade fell near them, and was followed by others in quick succession. When distant from the trenches by only twenty-five yards, a shell exploded in their midst, hurling them all to the ground. Obregón sat up at once and perceived that his right arm was gone from the elbow. But what utterly dismayed him was an intense pain in the side, which led him to suppose that the shell which had struck him there as well had mortally wounded him. The great loss of blood confirmed this impression.

Believing death to be removed from him only by an agony of a few hours, he determined to spare his friends that distressing spectacle. Accordingly, with his left hand he grasped a little pistol which he carried, pointed it to his left temple, and, hoping to complete the work which the shell had only partially achieved, pulled the trigger. But by an extraordinary piece of good luck the barrels were empty. The pistol had been taken by Captain Valdez on the preceding day to clean, and had not been reloaded. At this conjuncture a colonel rushed up, snatched the pistol from Obregón's hand, and had him carried inside the courtyard, where the danger from the shells was somewhat less. Indian soldiers and officers, whose stoicism is proverbial, wept bitterly at the spectacle of their beloved chief, cut off, as they thought, in the flower of his age.

Obregón himself, and indeed his officers too, believed that he was dying, and there was no expert at hand who knew better. At this time he was betrothed to the Señorita Maria Tapia, now his wife, who was following his career with painful interest and growing anxiety. But all his thoughts were centred on duty. He called for his generals, whom he instructed to choose his successor, and he exhorted his staff to serve that successor with the loyalty and self-abnegation which they had displayed towards himself. He was then taken on a stretcher over an arid strip of land under the scorching rays of a June sun, exposed to the enemy's fire. In the afternoon the amputation took place, after which Obregón received the various chiefs of his staff, listened to their reports, and on the following day he again began to issue orders as supreme commander of the forces. Four days later he travelled to Leon in his train, to give battle once more to his enemy.

Another of the many striking contingencies which reveal

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at once the spirit in which he breasted the blows of circumstance and the overmastering anxiety he felt for the welfare of his fellows, occurred soon after the foregoing episode and at a moment when, owing to lack of munitions, the fortunes of the Constitutionals were at their lowest ebb.\* Villa was advancing steadily without encountering any serious obstacles. He had taken the city of Leon and was moving triumphantly southwards. Obregón's troops were on short rations. Their munitions were giving out and the supplies on the way were cut off. The telegraphic wires to the south were severed. There was no combustible for the trains. Obregón had taken guides who, perhaps unwittingly, led him on to a scorched plain to the edge of an impassable ravine. "We had to spend the night," he writes, "in a desert, the aridity of which baffles description. The soldiers could not find a log of wood to burn, a mouthful of water wherewith to quench their thirst, nor a tree trunk to which to tether their horses. Never before had the enemy been favoured by a more splendid opportunity to inflict upon us a complete defeat."

And never before were Obregón's soldiers or himself so close to utter ruin. Villa captured some of his remaining transports and his straggling soldiers. And to crown his misfortunes he was encumbered by some thousands of men, women and children, who had flocked from various villages to his camp for protection. Truly it was a situation calculated to drive him to despair.

Nor was that all. Scarcely a month had elapsed since his arm had been amputated and his other wounds treated, and he had been actively commanding his forces ever since. He was on horseback all day. The water he drank was muddy. His wounds had not yet cicatrized and were causing him agonies. He was unable to sleep at night. His nerves were all ajar, and he gazed steadfastly at the grim spectres of death and of failure. Athwart these dark clouds the one ray of hope that cheered him somewhat came from his favourite expedient, audacity. "There is nothing for it," he said, "but to take the town of Aguas Calientes by assault. Rash? Yes, it is certainly rash, but it is the one practicable issue out of our straits. The ammunition will barely allow us to attempt it, and will not suffice for any other operation forward or backward. The

\* July 10th, 1915.

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troops are weary and worn out. To-morrow\* at noon we shall rest in Aguas Calientes or in bloody graves."

He had spent two nights of wretched watchfulness, racked by the torture of physical pain and moral anguish. Before lying down on the ground on the third night he called for his pistols. His old friend and schoolfellow, A., who slept at his feet, became uneasy.

"If the General's nerve should give way under the tremendous strain, who knows what he may do to himself?" Accordingly he watched and waited. Everyone slept soundly on the plain, but the sentinels, the General and the friend of his boyhood. Obregón kept turning uneasily from side to side. Then he suddenly sat up. A. did likewise. "It is extraordinary," exclaimed Obregón querulously, "that I cannot make a movement without your doing the same." A. made no reply, but remained in a sitting posture. Soon afterwards the General tried once more to court sleep, but with no better result.

Just before dawn he sprang to his feet and went out into the plain. A. followed him closely but discreetly. Obregón mournfully surveyed the sleeping army. The faces of soldiers and officers were indistinguishable one from the other—all being grey like the earth. Then Obregón, turning in the direction of the rear-guard, where all the unfortunate old men, women and children lay unconscious of their danger, exclaimed: "Look at all those defenceless souls who depend upon me for protection! I and I alone am responsible for their fate!" And tears rolled down his cheeks as he spoke.

"I have known Obregón ever since his school-days," added the narrator, "and never before or after have I seen him weep. Those tears were the acknowledgment of his responsibility towards the civil population, who relied upon him for their safety. At this moment," Señor A. concludes his narrative, "General Pina awoke and I motioned him to come to me. I then asked him to call the doctor and get a potion for the commander, to assuage his pain and calm his nerves. Within an hour it was ready. The powder, whatever it may have been, was dissolved in water thick with mud. But the General was soon himself again."

At noon on the 10th of July, as Obregón had predicted, he and his exhausted forces entered the town of Aguas Calientes,

\* July 10th, 1915.

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and the severest crisis in the fortunes of the revolutionists had passed away.

In spite of the drastic measures which undoubtedly marked Obregón's conduct of the war and of the unbending firmness with which he carried them out, it is no exaggeration to say that of all the army chiefs he was one of the few who, looking upon brute force as essentially immoral and an evil to be thrust aside at the earliest opportunity, displayed unmistakable marks of true generosity and a desire to exercise clemency whenever this was consistent with the pursuit of his main purpose. True, these symptoms may have appeared spasmodic to the outsider whose own glimpses at Mexican events were at best fitful and vague. But they were none the less real, and as time lapsed and the revolutionary cause triumphed, it became more and more evident that he was a man of moderation, not of mere force. And the rising against Carranza, which he headed several years later and brought to a satisfactory issue, was characterized by a degree of clemency and conciliatoriness which is most unusual in popular outbreaks. When travelling through the various States of the Republic after the death of the ill-starred Don Venustiano, I became cognizant of numerous instances of the humanity with which the victors, hearkening to Obregón's instructions, treated their vanquished persecutors. In the town of Carmen,\* for example, the new mayor,† who had been made to suffer long and intensely because of his political connections, hindered the populace from lynching his enemies, had them conveyed in coaches to their homes, and then pleaded for them successfully with the enraged people. Obregón's solicitude for the life of his ancient chief, his endeavours—fortunately successful—to reduce bloodshed to a minimum, and his generosity towards the vanquished are traits which bring out the best and least known qualities of the man.

Fire and sword had at last done their fell work. Villa, after his signal defeat, made desperate attempts to retrieve the disaster, but soon found that he had lost his prestige irremediably, and together with that many of his influential friends and supporters. Speedily he sank to the level of a desperate cut-throat, incendiary and outlaw, his mind void of ideas, his

\* A delightful city in the State of Campeche.

† Enriquez Gomez.

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will abandoned to delirious impulse, and his heart destitute of human ruth. Henceforward his sole occupation was to blow up trains, kidnap wealthy individuals and hold them to ransom, to plunder, slay and destroy the handiwork of God and man. Even his powerful friends in Washington, among whom were included General Scott and President Wilson, despite Villa's promise to co-operate with the United States army against his own countrymen, now turned away from this scourge of man and permitted Constitutionalist troops to pass through United States territory in order to assail him in his native fastnesses.

Thereupon Villa, in an uncontrollable impulse of revenge, crossed the frontier with his troops, slew American citizens\* and brought the troops of the United States into Mexico. The second part of this miscreant's life, which is as remarkable as the first, will be sketched in another chapter.

Obregón had accomplished his mission and was now ready to sheathe the sword. Carranza had been recognized by the Government of the United States. The victorious General represented his country at a conference with General Hugh Scott at El Paso for the purpose of settling the differences that had arisen between the two Governments through Villa's wild freak and the consequent invasion of Mexican territory by United States troops. Obregón refused to discuss the matter until those troops should evacuate the soil of his country, and he finally gained his point, General Pershing being ordered to withdraw.

Those were some of the experiences which contributed to the evolution he was undergoing. He mused on the ever-changing scenes through which he passed in the course of his long campaign and the subsequent diplomatic negotiations. He had marched through fever-breeding swamps and immeasurable wildernesses of yellow and red sand, where not a bird can live, not a blade of grass can grow, no drop of water is to be had, and where large bodies of troops fighting for his own cause had perished miserably of thirst. His soldiers had bivouacked in desolate valleys that once were smiling and fruitful. They had slept at the base of ancient pyramids as massive as those of Egypt and by the ruins of once populous and stately cities, where a cultured race had lived, worked and passed away in

\* In the State of New Mexico on March 9th, 1916.

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ages long gone by, and where every atom of earth is human dust and every breath of wind and drifting cloud-shadow evokes ghosts of a vanished world and an extinct race. They had seen the wreck of temples where the sun had had homage and the moon worship, and where fanatical priests had chaunted wild hymns of praise and prayer to the cruel war-god created in their own image while drums and flutes drowned the shrieks of agonizing victims whose hearts were being torn out for a peace offering.

To Obregón the civilization of the present day seemed to be on the eve of being swept away as completely as those of the ancient peoples of Mexico by the sequence of disasters that were overwhelming the population. The sight of razed villages, dilapidated towns, smoking manor houses and famine-stricken people made a profound and lasting impression on him and intensified his hatred of war.

During the tumults, risings and systematic banditry which had come to be looked upon as the normal state of the Republic, he and his friends were the only leaders of note who fought with a clear-cut plan for an avowable end. Hating the effusion of blood, they had recourse to military force as the only efficacious means of abolishing violence once for all, their aim being the establishment of peace, order and law on a firm basis. The ideals which they held before the eyes of their distracted countrymen were morality and justice.

To admit that during his military career, which thus opened as a call of conscience, Obregón sometimes wandered beyond the bounds of the permissible is not to deny the inspiration or disparage the response which it evoked, but merely to record the fact that in the heat of the struggle he, like most war-leaders, subordinated to the exigencies of the campaign considerations which claim and deserve profound respect. But unlike most generals in Mexico and abroad, he frankly confesses that war—unless imposed by self-defence—is essentially immoral. Only by quibbles and fallacies, therefore, can the excesses committed during that long-drawn-out struggle be glossed over or extenuated. As they stand on record they must be included in the general account and entered on the debit side of their authors.

## CHAPTER X

### THE STRUGGLE FOR UNION

ONE day, soon after Carranza had come into power, a friend of mine ventured discreetly to hint that many of his fellow-workers were living contradictions of the political principles for which he had fought. He replied :

"I confess that some of them are drags, not helps, and I should be glad to be rid of them. But I cannot dismiss them, at least not at once. They stood by me in times of need, and it would be a piece of baseness on my part were I to turn my back upon them in the hour of my triumph. Besides," he added reflectively, "if I did, I should be jeopardizing the work accomplished."

That was the keynote of Carranza's attitude towards the hangers-on of the revolution. And they wrought havoc, first with the nation and then with himself.

Madero too had deplored this plague of revolutionary movements, without, however, contriving to alleviate or escape it. In striking contrast with his weakness was Obregón's firmness, as manifested in his public declaration some years later at the opening of his electoral campaign, when friends were pressing their attentions upon him and ingeniously seeking to learn what offices the future had in store for them.

"I mean to keep a free hand. Neither friendship nor services to the cause shall any longer be passports to office. Fitness is indispensable, and I will recognize no other criterion. Those who have deserved well of their country have but done their duty, and will find their reward in the gratitude of their fellow-citizens and the approval of their conscience. The administration requires administrators, and one may be a good patriot and yet be a poor public servant."

Carranza was gifted with many qualities, some of them



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quite uncommon in Mexico, such as untiring industry, tenacity of purpose, circumspection, a firm grasp of detail, and a sincere desire to make his country great. But they were neither so felicitously combined nor seconded by such capacities of a higher order as to qualify him for the part which he set himself to play from the first. Not only was he wanting in political vision, but he had not the knack of winning affection or awakening enthusiasm among his partisans. He was out of vital contact with the people. His ideal of statecraft was to sit in the National Palace, receive reports, confer with officials, think out schemes and issue edicts. In his leisure time he studied history, but he always kept aloof from men.

Powerfully built, with a venerable countenance, to which a patriarchal beard and huge spectacles imparted a touch of the oriental mystic, he was always a respectable, never a popular figure. For he lacked not only the personal magnetism which draws and captivates the multitude, but also the straightforwardness, trust and affability of address which form the cement of ordinary social relations. And in his later years he became eminently uncongenial.

That Carranza looked upon his own unquestioned ascendancy as at once the potential cause and the mainstay of public order and national prosperity is notorious. This conceit would not have been blameworthy were it not delusive. So common is it in public life, however, that it would be a blessing if the well-being of the community were the invariable consequence of the attainment of office by the successful politician. As things are, if the man who aims at power be the one who is able to wield it to the best purpose his ambition cannot reasonably be censured. If Don Venustiano had been a man of vision, grasp and moral rectitude, capable of guiding the unchained forces of the revolution, no serious objection could be taken to his striving. And Obregón would have gladly seconded him to the end. But, as it chanced, he was the reverse of this. Stubbornness usurped the place of will-power, and rustic shrewdness bordering upon cunning that of superior intelligence. He resembled most Mexican reformers in his set purpose so to better his country that he himself should be its lord and master.

But his defects were decorously concealed under an exterior which not merely inspired decent respect, but also impressed

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the average man with a belief in his wisdom and resolution. He read much, but he knew the outside world and, one may add, a great part of his own country solely through writings and reports, containing other people's impressions, while the reality was a book with seven seals to him. His natural haughtiness and inordinate self-esteem gradually drew him into veiled opposition to the cause of orderly government and public morality, and his shortsightedness kept him from realizing this antagonism. It is no exaggeration to say that he was poorly equipped for any such great enterprise as that on which he embarked, and that he owed his elevation largely to Obregón and his long tenure of power partly to President Wilson.

Those facts and inferences impressed themselves little by little on the mind of the General, who, however, kept his gaze riveted throughout on the goal towards which the country was imperceptibly advancing.

One marked instance of Carranza's distrust and fear lest some popular leader should arise to dispute with him the supreme power, occurred in the summer of 1913. Obregón was then making noteworthy headway against the usurper Huerta, and fast gaining a reputation for military prowess, which might awaken national enthusiasm if allowed to grow unchecked. Suddenly Carranza issued orders suspending offensive operations in the north, which in Obregón's judgment would have soon brought the civil war to a close, and depriving the victorious troops there of the wherewithal to attack the enemy. The munitions of war he caused to be sent to Matamoros, to a general of his own creation, Pablo González, who was professedly expected to achieve the victories necessary to eclipse Obregón's successes. This fatuous measure retarded the defeat of Huerta by some six months, and protracted the sufferings of the population correspondingly.

It is but fair to say that, however certain Obregón's zealous friends and Carranza's bitter enemies may feel that that ill-judged order was the outcome of petty jealousy and a desire to keep a commanding figure from rising above the dead level of mediocrity, the unbiassed chronicler will have to add to the considerations which may possibly have moved Carranza, a reasonable fear, warranted by Mexican history, that any military chief who rose high in popular estimation would seek

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to overthrow the Constitutional Government at the risk of precipitating a fratricidal war.\* And the late First Chief is entitled to the benefit of the doubt, with the rider that he looked upon himself as the Constitutional Government. None the less Obregón, who was burning with fierce impatience to drive Huerta from the dictatorial arm-chair, chafed under this clogging system of checks and counterchecks. It is amusing to learn that after every one of Obregón's military successes Carranza's son-in-law, Candido Aguilar, was wont to dispatch a sobering telegram to him, exhorting him not to allow himself to be puffed up with vanity.

Obregón was all the more exasperated that General González was making no perceptible headway, and indeed could hardly be expected to make any. For, by all accounts, the troops commanded by that General were among the most undisciplined and ruthless bodies of men that even Mexico had seen. They delighted in destruction for its own sake, destruction of everything but the enemy's forces. And yet General González enjoyed the services of a highly-paid staff which had no equal in the world's military history—in point of numbers. For it consisted of some four hundred and sixty members, and included a large element of female adventurers rebellious to rudimentary conventionality and avid of pelf. Many of these *hetærae* had received military rank for their favours, some being colonels, others captains and lieutenants—and all of them drew corresponding pay.

That a man of Carranza's ambition and inborn shrewdness should have expected any military success from an army such as that is hardly conceivable. And yet it remains on record that he jeopardized the triumph of the revolutionary movement by withdrawing munitions from Obregón's army, consigning them to General González, and suspending the only operations of which the enemy stood in dread. Incidentally he was squandering the substance of the nation, paying, feeding and clothing those dregs and scourges of the community. It is noteworthy that General González himself received, over and above his pay and all the expenses of his motley staff and of the rank and file, one thousand pesos daily for his personal needs or caprices.

\* That is also the view held by Obregón, whose judgments of his adversaries are measured and lenient.

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No less curious and characteristic is the fact, convincing proofs of which are still available, that later on, at the very time, indeed, when Obregón was fighting and repulsing Villa, the First Chief, whom he was thus elevating to the highest place in the Republic, had sent secret agents to the United States with instructions to get a section of the Press there to insert articles against "Obregónism," on the ground that Obregón was a wild Socialist, who, if he were allowed to play the game of politics, would become a grave danger to order and tranquillity.

This bent towards underhand manœuvres and double-dealing is a persistent trait in Mexican politics. In a previous chapter we saw that at a most critical moment, when a split in the national forces was imminent, and Obregón, intent on bridging the chasm between Carranza and Villa, had gone to Chihuahua, running the risk of being murdered by the latter, Carranza, who was fully aware of his envoy's precarious situation, rendered it quite desperate by dispatching an angry and humiliating telegram to Villa.

That telegram, which explains much of what occurred at the Chihuahua interview, was virtually tantamount to Obregón's death-warrant, and if the sentence was not executed, it was owing solely to the remarkable series of lucky accidents already described. It requires, therefore, an unusual degree of Christian charity or magnanimity to ascribe this and similar actions of the First Chief to motives which would materially alter the current estimate, either of his moral integrity or of his intellectual equipment.

A nature like Obregón's, instinctively observant and superlatively sensitive to the incongruous in life and action, gave their full value to those amazing facts. It was true then that a whirl of personal interests and selfish aims were imparting a wrong direction to the movement which he, with indomitable spirit, was toiling and moiling to bring to the one desirable goal. His mind was occasionally haunted by misgivings, which events justified, as to the changes that the vicissitudes of politics might eventually produce, even in many of those who were still the bearers of the new gospel. But those transient presentiments never caused him to falter or to hesitate.

His is not a brooding soul. He is essentially a doer, in

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close sympathy with the onward march of the age and the hour, and irresistibly impelled to appeal to experience and to trust to it for guidance.

But his faith in Carranza was shaken. Continued loyalty to the First Chief was thenceforth only loyalty to the cause, rooted in a desire to fructify the hard-won victory and consolidate such constructive forces as could still be gathered around the lost leader.

Numerous instances might be given of Carranza's irrational distrust of Obregón as the rival from whom he had most to fear. Over the relations of those two men Fate, from the very outset, might be said to have flung its chilling shadow, of which they were both fitfully conscious. At the height of Carranza's power the image of Obregón seems to have discharged the functions of the skeleton at the feast, acting as a sort of *memento mori*.

At times the First Chief appeared to be haunted by a superstitious dread of his military associate, inexplicable by anything that had passed between them, and yet so strong that he found it difficult to master and impossible to conceal. A mere coincidence, interesting to a child, but of no significance to a man of action, would appeal to the mystical side of his nature, evoke disturbing thoughts and leave a profound impress. For example, Carranza, describing the emotion which the sudden arrest of President Madero awakened within him, told this story :

"I, who certainly am not given to pray, actually felt impelled to uplift my voice in earnest supplication to the saint of the day that he would intercede with God to save Madero's life and have him set at liberty. And I asked an adjutant to find me the name of that saint. Now is it not curious, to say the least, that it chanced to be on the 19th of February that the evil tidings reached me, and that that day is dedicated to St. Alvaro, Obregón's patron saint? It is very curious. Alvaro ! ""\*

How constantly on the alert Carranza was to keep Obregón in sight, and as far as possible under his control, may be illus-

\* In connection with the story it is only just to observe that, not only is there no ground for the statement now current that Carranza was intriguing against Madero, but it is certain that he was genuinely attached to him. That is one of the groundless charges preferred against him to which the hibernicism applies : "Many of the calumnies current about him are probably lies."

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trated by another little story, which also incidentally characterizes the circuitous methods of the one and the plain frankheartedness of the other. One day, in the city of Hermosillo,\* at the height of the campaign, Obregón's orderly entered the room with a visiting-card in his hand, and announced that a gentleman wished to see him.† When ushered in the stranger presented a note of introduction from his friend Carranza. It set forth that the bearer was a friend of the writer and an officer of great experience and trust, who could make himself extremely useful as Chief of the General's Staff, and expressed the hope that Obregón would verify his fitness in the course of a friendly talk, and, if found qualified, would give him the position.

Obregón was annoyed less by the proposal—although that, too, seemed uncalled-for and offensive—than by the artful way in which it was made. After a few friendly words with his visitor, he sought out Carranza and, holding up the letter, inquired: "Is this an order? If so, I should like to have it formally and in writing."

"An order? Oh, no! It is only a recommendation, a friendly suggestion. Still, I do earnestly request you to take it into consideration. X. is an accomplished officer, conversant with the technique of the military art, which is a strong point, and therefore well fitted for the post."

"The post is not vacant," retorted General Obregón; "all posts on my staff are filled by young men who have my confidence and deserve it, and if this letter is not going to be transformed into a formal written command, they will all continue to occupy their present positions."

Carranza, like the cat that dearly loves the fish but shrinks from wetting its tail, hesitated to issue an order which might have had grave consequences, so the matter ended there.

But Don Venustiano, in his exertions to retain the supreme power unchallenged, did not confine himself to measures of supervision, checks and kindred precautions. Incapable of comprehending the motives to which Obregón was responsive, he tried him very guardedly with the usual baits, which had proved so efficacious with a number of the champions of democracy and public morality.

\* The capital of the State of Sonora. The incident occurred in the year 1918.

† As the person in question is still living, I withhold his name.

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Many Mexican generals and politicians were impressible to motives of a vulgar nature. Was this general an exception? He would ascertain. Accordingly, one day\* he inquired of Obregón how the garbanzo† fields looked in the North, and what were the prospects of the coming harvest there. The reply was that there were hopes of a fair crop. Soon afterwards Obregón, to his surprise, received from the First Chief an official pass authorizing him to have the entire produce conveyed over the frontier free of the export duty to which everybody else was subject. Obregón returned it forthwith, explaining that he saw no reason why he should be exempted from a tax which fell upon everybody else.

"Everybody else has not rendered the same services to the State as you have."

"But I have been paid for them in full, both by the State and by my conscience," was the answer.

"Well, but General Maytorena has accepted a pass entitling him to export two thousand head of cattle duty free, so you see you will not be alone."

"In such cases examples go for nothing. I am not Maytorena, nor have we both a conscience in common."

The pass was inexorably refused, and the export duty paid in full. Three years later,‡ when Obregón had sent in his army accounts, they included certain debts—advances received—which he now deducted from the total sum due to him. Carranza, however, in a lordly spirit, had the entire sum paid to him and cancelled the debts. Obregón refused to accept the remission, and insisted on the liability being subtracted.

"But what I am doing for you I have done for General X," was the justification offered.

The answer, however, was an emphatic refusal to accept any such concessions. The only occasion on which Obregón consented to receive anything more than his ordinary pay was when a money recompense was voted to all the generals without exception, as is done in Great Britain and some other countries, after the termination of a successful campaign.

On the occasion of Obregón's second marriage—to the accomplished Señorita Maria Tapia—Carranza presented him, in the guise of a wedding gift, with a superb motor-car, fit for

\* In the year 1913.

† Chick peas.

‡ In 1916.

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a prince. But the General, whose tastes are simple, and who abhors show, continued to use his own plain automobile, and soon afterwards had to sell them both. Carranza, having heard of the transaction, asked him reproachfully, when they next met, why he had disposed of the wedding present.

"The truth is that I had certain obligations to meet, and as I lacked ready money and could not disappoint my creditors, I sold not only the car which you so kindly gave me, but also my own."

"Why ever did you not tell me?" asked the First Chief. "I would have settled those bills at once. But it is not yet too late. Please let me know the amount."

"It would be too late at any time, then or now, for anything but my sincere thanks for your kind offer," was Obregón's categorical response.

There is little doubt that Don Venustiano misinterpreted those and other similar refusals, ascribing them to a settled resolve on the General's part to mortify him. The truth is, however, that he never understood—could not, in fact, understand—the man with whom he had to deal. Ethically, as well as intellectually, they were moving on different planes. Obregón, on the other hand, took the measure of the President's mental and moral calibre with accuracy, but judged him with a degree of leniency which falls little short of the ideal of Christian charity. None the less his keen sense of humour was occasionally tickled by the clumsy and futile efforts made by the President to reconcile theory with practice, duty with dereliction, democratic principles with dictatorial propensity. One day when in this vein he remarked to Carranza: "One of the newspapers has published an interview which its representative here had with you a short time ago."

"Possibly. What did it say? Anything important or sensational?"

"No, no. The correspondent merely stated that he had asked you who was Huerta, and that you had replied: 'Chief of Bandits.' Next he inquired who Villa is, and you had answered: 'Chief of the Highwaymen.' Finally he requested you to define your own position, and you told him that you were the 'Supreme Chief.'"\*

\* Carranza conferred upon himself the title of "First Chief."



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But Carranza, who lacked a sense of humour and could not take a joke, merely frowned.

Carranza was encircled by flatterers, favourites and self-seeking helpers, but he lacked disinterested friends. No man enamoured of himself ever has rivals. Carranza was beloved by none, he trusted none, and acted as though he suspected everyone. Advice, whencesoever it came, was subject to suspicion. It might be the beginning of a plot or the symptom of an incipient rebellion, and was resented accordingly. He never permitted his own plans to be criticized, nor the suggestions of others to be advocated in his presence. In order to get a hearing for a project one had to piece it together from views which he himself had expressed or hinted at in casual conversations, and the only man possessed of the materials for devising such schemes and of the qualities and defects indispensable and adequate to this rôle of adroit intellectual *accoucheur* was Luis Cabrera, a lawyer and one of the ablest and most versatile men as a writer, a conversationalist, a composer of diplomatic notes and a deviser of expedients, in the Republic. He was a veritable prestidigitator of the Chancellery, a past master in the vanishing art of weaving what the Italians term *combinazioni* and devising plausible answers to insoluble riddles. Self-possessed, good-humoured, resourceful and fluent, he could talk interestingly for hours, and put forward specious paradoxes without being tedious. And he further possessed what was a strong recommendation in Carranza's eyes, the advantage of being contented to flourish like the violet in the shade.

This retiring disposition had its advantages—it carried with it exemption from responsibility, and responsibility was a spectre of which Cabrera had a mortal fear. Consequently he allowed his master to gather in whatever of praise or blame accrued to the author of the various shifts which at first usurped the place of a policy. Of him, therefore, as a possible rival, the President had no fear.

During his connection with Carranza, which lasted until the latter's death, Cabrera set his mark upon Mexican affairs and acquired for the Republic a reputation abroad which it has not yet wholly lived down. He owed such success as he achieved—and in particular his chief's undisturbed tenure of office—partly to his exalted foreign ally, President Wilson,

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whose idealism in politics, like that of President Madero, might aptly be termed the virtue of inexperience. Señor Cabrera had the valuable knack of presenting in literary or legal shape, as occasion might require, Carranza's own disconnected ideas or wishes, and of producing a pleasant surprise in the President's mind at the likeness between their modes of thinking. The materials on which Cabrera worked were not human beings, but documents, and the information which he conveyed to his superior consisted of his own impressions of other people's conceptions.

Carranza set a high value on the services of his gifted lieutenant, as may be gathered from the following incident. When the seat of his Government was still Veracruz, Carranza's activities became so obnoxious, even to the members of his own Cabinet, of whom Cabrera was one, that they could brook it no longer. They accordingly met, discussed the situation, and unanimously decided to resign in a body by way of protest. Carranza accepted the resignations of all but Cabrera, who forthwith disregarded his protest and remained at his post.

Thereafter the two men worked together harmoniously, and illustrated the saying that stupidity is dangerous only when seconded by intelligence. They lived in an imaginary world until May, 1920, when the reality, like a whiff of fresh air blowing upon some ancient Egyptian papyrus, scattered the regime to dust.

In view of all that had gone before it was natural that Obregón should hesitate before complying with President Carranza's request that he would accept the portfolio of War in his Cabinet. He distrusted the Head of the State, and was apprehensive of the effects of his regime on the country. But Carranza's plans and policies were as yet but imperfectly understood. Moreover, he knew well how to elevate the alloy in his composition by the solemnity of his mien and the wisdom of his words. Besides, his course was beset with distracting difficulties, and it would have been unfair not to allow for these. And Obregón—impressed still more profoundly by the consideration that such a gesture of public disapproval as his refusal to co-operate with the man who was the symbol of the Constitutional movement might endanger the cause for which so much blood had been shed—joined the Cabinet as Secretary

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for War and found himself at the head of an army computed at 150,000 men.\*

But he would not allow his attitude to be mistaken for connivance, nor his co-operation to be construed as approval. Whenever he differed from his Chief he spoke out clearly. Suspecting a certain general of dishonest practices, he sent a trusted individual to make exhaustive inquiries on the spot. It soon came to light that the commander was receiving large sums of money for the upkeep of a numerous military force, of which more than half were soldiers who existed only on paper. He was therefore embezzling large sums of money taken from the people. Obregón presented a strong report on this fraud to Carranza, and was taken aback at the President's undisguised reluctance to move in the matter. There could be little doubt that the President was resolved to connive at the abuse. But Obregón was inflexible. That unfaithful steward, he insisted, must go at all costs, otherwise he would not remain at the head of the Ministry. Carranza, seeing no other issue out of the difficulty, recalled the general, but deadened his fall by a present of a large sum of money, "in consideration of the valuable services which he had rendered the nation."

Again, it was one of the General's duties as War Minister to sign an order periodically in virtue of which General González was wont to receive, over and above all other allowances and his pay as general, one thousand Mexican dollars per day for private expenses, of which he had to render no account.

This, for an advocate of equality and a champion of the lack-alls, was indeed a fall from grace on the part of the President, and the War Minister winced at it. Still, as the document was regularly laid before him for his signature, this is what he wrote: "By special order of the First Chief."

"Why do you sign in that unusual way?" asked Carranza. "Why not set your name under the order as you do in other cases?"

"Because if I did my approval would be supposed to go with my signature. And as I strongly disapprove of making such an allowance to General González, I have to state expressly whence the order emanates." And he refused to omit the damaging qualification.

Nor was it only to Carranza that Obregón bade defiance

\* March 18th, 1916.

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when defiance was prompted by respect for truth or fidelity to principle. He spoke out his mind bluntly and fully to Parliament when that sacred body, in deference to the President's whim, swerved from the straight course without a qualm. For with him there is no acceptance of persons or of assemblies. Truth does not become falsehood because it chances to be resented by those who deem themselves the spokesmen of the people. Obregón obeys no manifestations of force, however imposing, whether they proceed from above or below. The object of his solicitude is indeed the people, but the people is nowise identical with a socialistic and still less with a bolshevist crowd, nor even with large gatherings of benighted beings who, like their ancestors before the Fall, lack the knowledge of good and evil and are still probationers awaiting admission to the community of progressive humanity.

This independence of judgment and boldness of action are among Obregón's most valuable assets. It is furthermore fair to add that on the whole he maintained his ground under the heaviest pressure put upon him by enemies invested with power and by circumstance apparently destined to pulverize him.

Obregón's enemies, some of whom are endowed with the mythopœic faculty, have never accused him of using his power or his influence for any purpose but the public weal. Even in cases where public opinion would have tolerated such pressure as customary and permissible, he eschewed it. During his tenure of office as War Minister, for example, an election was about to take place for the governorship of his own State, Sonora, the candidates being his brother José and General Calles. Friends urged him to give a helping hand to the former and secure his return. His answer was characteristic: "Either it is to be a real election or a disguised appointment. The law prescribes the former and forbids the latter, and I am here to observe the law. My brother must therefore stand or fall on his own merits."

His brother failed and General Calles was elected Governor.

Another incident is worth noting here which brings out in sharp relief some of the less known traits of Obregón and Carranza. The latter convoked a Convention for the drafting of a new Constitution for the Republic, the need of which was generally recognized. But the delegates were selected

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arbitrarily by the President and his handy men. Among those admitted were three individuals\* who had been instrumental in raising the usurper Huerta to the presidency, and had legalized his lawless acts. On two separate occasions their conduct had been publicly stigmatized as treason, and they themselves condemned to death by Carranza himself.† Capital punishment therefore awaited them, not promotion to membership of a constituent assembly.

But shortly before the Constituent Congress was elected the First Chief had changed his mind, for reasons of his own, and eagerly advocated their admission. Nor was that all. He actually asserted that, far from being traitors or the accomplices of traitors, they were first-class patriots—for if they remained in Huerta's Cabinet aiding and abetting the usurper, they had done this solely in compliance with his own express but secret directions which he had given for the purpose of obstructing Huerta and his Government! This was indeed a sensational statement, which definitely placed Carranza's reputation for honesty between the upper and the nether mill-stones.

Thereupon Obregón, who at that time was War Minister, indited a remarkable letter to the Constituent Congress, attacking the attitude of the First Chief and those who abetted him, appealing to the conscience of the nation and convicting Carranza of unvaracity by his own solemn decrees. He informed the Congress that no such secret instructions could have been given, because Carranza himself condemned those men to death after the commission of the acts laid to their charge. Moreover, if it were true that they had indeed played the treacherous part ascribed to them, first collaborating with Huerta for half a year against Madero, and then plotting against Huerta in virtue of secret instructions from Carranza, they were recreant betrayers of the nation, of Madero, and also of Huerta. Their treason therefore was triple.

"This," he adds, "proves that those individuals can be used to advantage as elements of treason, and their antecedents warrant us in assuming that . . . at present they are merely feigning to be working with Señor Carranza, whereas they may

\* They belonged to a political party known as "Renovadores."

† In the plan of Guadalupe and afterwards in a special decree against them issued in Durango on August 7th, 1913.

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really be acting under instructions from the Archbishop Mora y del Río and of Emiliano Zapata. . . .”

“Men,” he concluded, “may be mutilated and sacrificed for principles, but principles must not be mutilated nor sacrificed for men.”\*

\* This letter is dated 20th December, 1916.

## CHAPTER XI

### OBREGÓN BREAKS WITH CARRANZA

THE Turks have a saying which sometimes holds good even beyond their frontiers, that if you are bent on speaking the truth you must first put your foot in the stirrup and be ready to bolt.

In Mexico under Carranza's rule that maxim was often illustrated. Obregón accordingly expected that his letter would produce such a breach between him and the President that he could no longer remain in office, and in anticipation of the rupture had ready in his pocket his offer of resignation. But the President, to whom he announced his intention, was apprehensive of the results of his secession and refused to let him go. The matter of the three Renovators, as they were called, was settled in the approved Carranza style. The President's son-in-law, Candido Aguilar, appeared in Congress as a *deus ex machina* to announce the fateful tidings that the foreign invader was on Mexican soil, and exhorted the deputies not to waste precious time at such a critical conjuncture in wrangling over mere personalities, but to unite patriotically with all citizens of good will, and much else to the same effect; whereupon the postulants were admitted by acclamation to take their seats.

In the Cabinet, Obregón had hoped to become a binding link between honest citizens and the Carranza Administration, and also a moderating force among the members of the latter. How slender was the part he actually played in this second capacity may be inferred from what has already been written. That he continued to hold the triumphant Constitutionalists together will not be denied, although the historian will unhesitatingly award some portion of the credit or blame for the stability of Carranza's Government to President Wilson's seesaw course of action and inaction.

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As the months went by Obregón gradually took a gloomy, or rather a realistic, view of the situation. The fear of a party split came to be over-shadowed in his mind by the danger of national gangrene. The Administration lacked a programme, a policy and a moral purpose, and seemed averse to adopting any, and the Mexican community was breaking up in consequence.

None the less Carranza had a clear-cut policy, consisting of two definite aims which he pursued through thick and thin, without ever swerving or ever flagging. It may be roughly described as the compacting of the people into a nation and the raising of that nation to the leadership of the Latin-American world. To the realization of those objects he devoted his life.

But a plan, however ingenious, without means of carrying it out or with unsuitable means, is of little practical value. And Carranza had recourse to methods which must inevitably, and did eventually, defeat his ends. At home he trampled on the Constitution, tampered with the administration of justice and identified party, State and country with himself. Abroad he evinced a degree of hostility to the United States which was leading up to intervention, and would have put an end to his country's independence if Adolfo de la Huerta and Obregón had not come upon the scene in the nick of time and reversed his insensate tactics.

Carranza had begun his chiefship by ruling as a circumspect autocrat. And by way of gilding the pill he invented the term "Pre-Constitutional period," which meant a term of arbitrary misrule. But the fraud was transparent and its effects were sinister. Obregón and others who favoured plain speaking and plain dealing were perplexed and incensed by the divergence between what had been promised and what was now offered as fulfilment. In order to dispel their misgivings and carry out his own political plans Carranza convoked a body for the purpose, not of amending the old Constitution, as was originally intended, but of framing a new one. And as we saw, he selected the delegates without the slightest reference to the prescriptions of the existing Constitution or to a fair representation of the people. In fact the assembly was neither empowered by the nation nor warranted by the law, as it then stood, to discharge the functions with which he invested it.

This circumstance has been freely used by North American



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politicians and oilmen as an unanswerable argument for intervention. But it carries no weight. No one nation is another's keeper. Moreover, the English and other parliaments, which passed important laws, declared war and made peace, down to a relatively recent date were composed of members, some of whom owed their places to heritage, while many more were not representative of the people. But no foreign State ever took objection to them on that score. Again, the Republic of Guatemala is governed to-day by a President who, flouting all law, conspired against the legally constituted Government of his country, and by heading a revolt and shedding blood, usurped the presidency. Yet he has been officially recognized by the United States.

The fact is that when a whole people accept and agree to abide by an institution, law or regime, whatever its origin, outsiders have no call to question it.

And that was the case of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. The entire setting in which Carranza placed the body that drafted it was unworthy of the momentous object in view. And, as we saw, Obregón's voice was uplifted against one of the gross irregularities that characterized it. But the Constitution itself, which, although open to criticism in some respects, is unquestionably a vast improvement on that of 1857, was recognized at once by most of the Mexican States and afterwards by all, and is become the fundamental charter of the Republic.

This new charter will seem ultra democratic to many, who may also find fault with it as being too detailed and rigid. It probably overshot the mark in this respect. Side by side with admirable liberal innovations concerning the labour of women and children, which are only now being imitated in other countries, we find a number of specific prescriptions which smack of the by-laws of a trades union instead of suggesting the fundamental statutes of a Constitution.\* This, however, is by the way.

That Constitution has since been denounced by politicians of the United States as unacceptable to their country, although it did not prevent the official recognition of the Carranza Government by the Washington State Department. Excep-

\* The Constitution, which recognizes no corporate existence in any Church, authorizes the State to determine the maximum number of ministers of religious creeds "according to the needs of each locality!"

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tion was, however, immediately taken to the article which declares that "the ownership of lands and waters within the limits of the national territory is vested originally in the nation, which has had and has the right to transmit title thereof to private persons, thereby constituting private property."\*

It is true that the Mexican Government at that time gave an assurance that "present property rights" would be safeguarded by another article,† which deprived the former of retroactive force. None the less disputes arose between grasping oilmen and the Mexican authorities. The former, who possess a powerful organization, enlisted the Washington State Department on their side and pinned their hopes to military intervention, which they have since moved every available lever to bring about. It is fair to add that Carranza's thinly veiled hostility to the United States Government and his arbitrary edicts lent colour to the misgivings of foreign property owners, whose claims were often ignored by the Mexican authorities and whose legal complaints were sometimes perfunctorily and adversely decided by the lower tribunals and adjourned indefinitely by the Supreme Court.

Carranza's attitude on these and kindred matters was doubtless dictated by motives of policy. But the attitude was exasperating and the policy unsound. In addition to the friction produced in this way with foreign Powers, there was a reservoir of bitterness and discontent in the country, emanating largely from his abusive exercise of dictatorial power and partly also from personal ambitions and foreign intrigues. Abuses were growing, one might say, in direct ratio to the increase in the number and power of their beneficiaries, until in Carranza's camp it became difficult to discern any sure trace of the patriotic cause for which such heavy sacrifices had been made.

Obregón, with his habitual optimism, kept striving to influence the President to redress real grievances, where redress was within his power. His activities during the long and eventful period of his collaboration with Carranza, which was soon to terminate, were marked by consistent motive and ethical purpose, the latter at times somewhat hard to perceive athwart the smoke and reek of battles, but ever present, working steadily, if subtly, drawing him nearer the goal. In matters of justice and veracity he was now the conscience of his country. In the

\* Article 27.

† Article 14.

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practical sphere he exerted himself to turn interest and enterprise into new and useful channels. But despite his intentions, endeavours and partial success, he now stood in one of the most perplexing of the many critical situations of his eventful life.

His strong and attractive personality, quite apart from his brilliant military success as chief of the revolutionary movement and from his less resonant labours as moderator in the Cabinet, exercised a potent and moralizing effect on many of his contemporaries, and more particularly on the younger generation. Happily this influence—which is now more dominant than ever—fell in with the humanizing mood that has gradually come over a few of the accredited spokesmen of various nations as a consequence of the moral exhaustion produced by the world war. A fervent and unflagging desire to harmonize right with fact, to infuse into private enterprise and public duty high social aims and moral meaning, and to co-ordinate remote humanitarian interests throughout the world, contributed the animating force to most of his activities.

But those high-pitched preoccupations did not dull the keenness of his attention to the minor details of the everyday life of the community. What is particularly noteworthy and refreshing is the care with which he studied, and the pains he took to remedy, every abuse that was brought to his notice. A trivial instance of this—one of many, and valuable only as a token of the bent of his disposition—may fitly find a place here.

In the capital city furious driving was, as it still is, the cause of the death or mutilation of an appalling number of pedestrians and others who cannot be said to have contributed by negligence to bring about the mishaps to which they fall victims. Nor is it possible to abate the crime—for crime it certainly is—so long as the guardians of the law connive at the high-placed and wealthy, and fine many who strictly obey the traffic regulations. One day Obregón, then War Minister, when driving in the principal thoroughfare, was arrested by a rustic policeman and taken to the police station. The simple-minded Indian who apprehended him knew who he was and apologized profusely for his procedure, but pleaded strict orders recently issued and his fear of the consequences if he disobeyed them. The General's chauffeur angrily protested, but was speedily silenced by his master, who went to

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the police station and waited patiently there for some twenty minutes among a crowd of delinquents in an evil-smelling room until his case could be heard. When it came before the official in charge, not only was the offence forthwith condoned, but the wretched policeman who had arrested the Minister was roundly abused and summarily dismissed, for having failed to display the consideration due to a high official.

Thereupon Obregón, who had theretofore played but a passive part in the proceedings, said :

"This policeman has done his duty and deserves to be encouraged, not punished. You or your chief issued orders for the purpose of having them executed, and this man carried them out faithfully. I doubt whether you will find two per cent. of his comrades bold enough to follow his example. Is he worthy of chastisement for this scrupulous discharge of a distasteful duty? Is it fair to him or to the police force to teach them to discriminate between privileged and unprivileged citizens, instead of between the law-breakers and the law-abiding? Your words and acts are demoralizing, and I will see to it that they are dealt with as such. The policeman is a conscientious official, and as his exemplary conduct has brought him unmerited censure and threats, I now offer him this little gift as a token that the threats will not be executed and that the continued performance of his duty in the same spirit will lead to his promotion." And he handed a gold piece of twenty pesos to the delighted Indian.

The other trait of Obregón's career during those stirring years is the leniency with which he judged and treated a few men who were unworthy of his support. In some cases it is true, as in that of the First Chief, that he was guided by extrinsic considerations. Besides, he was constrained to use such human materials as were available, and this is one of those dire necessities which inspire one at times with misgivings for Mexico's future.

Doubtless, Carranza, at the outset, had played a useful rôle in the revolution as a rallying centre. But gifted with just ability enough to discharge this momentary function and make his exit decorously—as Obregón wished him to do—he was determined to remain on the stage and play the part which he had composed for himself in the national drama. And he had his way.

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Obregón, with hopes abated by his discouraging experience and the conviction that the First Chief was steering the State ship straight towards the rocks, turned over in his mind his future plan of action. Come what might, he felt that he could no longer lend the support of his presence to the Cabinet. Tendering his resignation therefore to the President, and turning a deaf ear to his suasive entreaties to remain, he withdrew, after having worked a twelve-month in the Ministry.

But so great was his moral authority that private life carried with it for him certain duties which would necessarily cut deep into the public affairs of the nation. If, for example, he still remained in the country, however quiescent, he must either tacitly lend moral countenance to the chief for whose elevation he shared the responsibility, or else, if by word or act he withheld his approval, he would forthwith become an object of persecution. For Carranza's maxim was: "He who is not with me is against me," and he would certainly not shrink from applying it to Obregón, whose neutrality would everywhere be construed as merited censure. Furthermore, the General, if a fateful crisis were precipitated while he was in the country, could not disregard the call of duty or abandon the cause of public order and morality. And as everybody knew this, his presence, in however private a capacity, would always be a stimulus to political friends and a menace to their adversaries. In a word, his stay in Mexico might lead to a renewal of the recent troubles, and as his country sorely needed peace he contemplated the painful course of voluntary exile. He finally decided to settle in South America and began to shape his plans accordingly.

This decision came as a stunning blow to Obregón's supporters, who had given of their best to purchase stable peace and general betterment for their fellow citizens. They argued that until the new danger was dispelled the one man capable of exorcizing it could not in conscience let the country face it alone. It was as much his duty to remain as it had been his duty to take up arms against Orozco and Huerta. To these arguments Obregón ultimately yielded, gave up his plan of voluntary exile, and set himself to found a syndicate of farmers in the States of Sonora and Sinaloa. The object of this association was so to regulate the exportation of chick peas that the crisis which menaced the growers from the practice of carrying on the busi-

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ness through numerous separate channels and lowering prices by reckless competition might be permanently warded off.

That scheme, like all those which he conceived and handled, he wrought out to a satisfactory issue, and while prosecuting it completed his knowledge, already extensive, of the subsidiary branches of agricultural industry. It was during this period that he invented a seed-sowing machine, which is still in use and demand, and which would, it is affirmed, have been distributed over a much wider area had it not been for the strange turns given to the political kaleidoscope by Don Venustiano, and the set-back to industry which ensued. Whatever undertaking Obregón set his hand to, the work seemed always to outstrip the workman.\*

I have his authority for saying that his retirement into private life was intended to be final, and that among the arguments that moved him to renounce his scheme of emigrating, the prospect of being entrusted later on with the unenviable task of cleaning the Augean stables of Mexican politics had no place. But circumstance is stronger than the will of man.

The management of the Farmers' Syndicate left Obregón considerable free time, part of which he resolved to utilize for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with the great North American Republic, of which he had seen but a small section along the frontier States.† This second visit marked an epoch in his life. The impressions he gathered during its all too brief duration were bracing, lasting and fruitful.

Fortunately, General Obregón, unlike the average traveller, is endowed with the right disposition for seeing a new country. His mind is a highly sensitive film. Both his theory of international converse and his powers of observation and assimilation make him an ideal traveller. He leaves his own and his country's weights, measures and prejudices at the frontier, and strives to see the foreign race as it is, to judge it by its own standards, with no pretension to condemn, deride, or even pardon, but only to understand and learn. For him differences of language, religion, customs, possess no deciding significance, being the outcome of local conditions over which the inhabitants of a country have no control. He knows that a Slav becomes

\* He recently invented a valuable hydraulic apparatus which has been patented in the name of a friend.

† In the year 1910.

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a patriotic German when bred and educated in Leipzig or Karlsruhe, a Christian child lives and dies a fairly devout Moslem when kidnapped and brought up in the house of a Pasha, and he has had officers in his own army who, although of European parentage, were thoroughly Mexican in sentiment. The only differences among peoples and individuals that deserve to count are those revealed by the standard of human worth and moral character. And these are independent of political and geographical frontiers. All other distinctions are conventional, and on conventional themes "there were never in the world," as Montaigne puts it, "two opinions alike."

"My journey through the United States," General Obregón remarked to me, "taught me much that was new and confirmed several conclusions which I had reached independently. It is impossible not to admire the initiative and perseverance of the population, and not to feel keyed up by the marvellous fruits of its exertions. If we could but engraft those qualities on our people the Mexico of the future would occupy a desirable position in the van of progressive nations.

"One of the withering blights of civilization has its source in people's utter ignorance of each other. They are constantly misjudging each other's characters and misinterpreting each other's acts, because they make to themselves caricatures instead of true pictures of foreign races. And out of this distorting medium spring the fierce hatred, the irrational fear, the constant distrust which estrange one from the other and ultimately bring about sanguinary conflicts. As an individual cannot be thoroughly understood apart from the community of which he is a member, neither can a nation be comprehended apart from the life of the whole human race.

"Now that fruitful source of misconceptions, jars and strife must be dried up as a condition *sine qua non* of the establishment of fruitful human intercourse. But who will undertake the task? Diplomats? A diplomatist usually lives in a golden cage. He knows people, but ignores the people. Even statesmen are wont to make merely partial surveys and take short views. How many are there among them who possess the courage—for even to think soundly requires courage—to visualize their own country as an integral part of the progressive human race and to weigh its temporary interests against its larger and permanent duties?

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"Unhappily there are no special institutions anywhere entrusted with the task of disseminating correct ideas about foreign nations and generating feelings of brotherhood among them. Well, it is high time to found some such bodies. In the meanwhile it is part of my plan to send the most promising youths in the Republic to complete their education abroad, so that when they return they may become earnest apostles of this gospel of universal fellowship which should and will displace the pharisaical gratitude which so many of the world's races and communities profess at not being as their neighbours. The money requisite for this work will be well spent. On the other hand, I hope to bring into the country a number of steady, hard-working foreigners, who will serve as leaven for the backward masses of our people.

"Formerly the unity of religious belief was appealed to as a means of drawing races and peoples together. You know as well as I do how short-lived was its success. To-day metaphysical ideas have no such hold on the masses. Neither have the involved clauses of treaties. Some people still profess to believe in their efficacy. But of what real use is a treaty of perpetual friendship between two peoples who hate each other, or who ascribe nefarious designs one to the other? What would you think of a marriage between a youth and a girl whose mutual dislike was profound and reciprocal? Would the marriage service produce a sacramental effect and make them love each other until death?

"What we need most of all is mutual acquaintanceship and the capacity to discern, under differences of languages, religions, customs and tradition, those common, enduring, spiritual energies and instincts that make us all brothers. If we accomplish this, justice and equity will one day govern the world. If we fail, militarism will get the upper hand and civilization go to the wall. In the latter contingency Mexico's fate would be calamitous. All my hopes and concrete plans are based on the assumption that justice, friendliness and morality will get the upper hand."

Here, as in most of his conceptions and schemes to realize them, Obregón displays a faculty which is neither reason only nor imagination, but might aptly be termed imaginative reason.

Over and above the ordinary effect of foreign travel—which is a fuller appreciation and warmer love of one's native



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land—there was another. He fell a-pondering on the causes which hindered his fellow countrymen from achieving any of the grandiose agricultural, commercial or industrial feats which stood to the credit of the citizens of the United States, despite the advantages, in many respects superior, which Nature has bestowed on Mexico. The external hindrances needed no study, being patent to all. Unrest, insecurity, destructiveness and moral exhaustion, the effects of protracted civil strife, furnished an adequate explanation of some of the obstacles to progress. But were there none others? Is there a sinister flaw deeply embedded in the soul of the Mexican people? . . .

And coming to concrete examples, the land in large districts of Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, is in some cases identical with that of the most fertile districts of California, and in others it is superior, while conditions for reclaiming and cultivating it are the same.

Whence, then, the enormous difference in the results?

Again, how does it happen that Mexican agricultural labourers are employed in the United States and paid as much as four and five dollars a day to raise crops which their own country could produce in even greater abundance? Why are industrial firms in the United States able to manufacture out of Mexican raw materials goods which are then imported into Mexico and sold at a profit there? If Mexico possesses the crude stuffs, the workmen, the water power, and might easily utilize all three more cheaply than the United States, how comes it that her people fail to profit by them, and are contented to pay an immense tribute to their Northern neighbours, who grow rich while Mexicans remain poor?

If Mexico is blessed with natural wealth to an incalculable extent, produces minerals, valued at over three million pesos a year; oil-wells—actually explored—whose potential capacity is estimated at over half a billion barrels annually, while the unexplored wells are believed to contain thousands of times more; if its forests yield the finest timber in the world in vast quantities; if it is endowed with all climates; has vast tracts of the most fertile soil in the world; if its rivers teem with excellent fish and its orchards abound in luscious fruits; if it could readily support a population of two hundred millions, as many experts aver, whence comes the blight that has stricken most of its sixteen million inhabitants with the pinch of sempi-

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ternal hunger, squalor and disease? Why is it that such of its wealth as is liquid would have lain undeveloped had it not been explored and handled by enterprising foreigners whose very presence was childishly resented by Carranza and his environment? Are the peoples of Mexico suffering from lack of initiative or lack of perseverance, or both? And when the diagnosis has been ascertained, is there a remedy available? Above all, can the people endure the drastic remedy or will this be more wasting than the disease?

Those were some of the questions to which Obregón's visit to the States imparted painful urgency. He mused on them for long and discussed them with others. Finally he completed his diagnosis and thought out a solution—apparently the most efficacious remedy that a statesman and ruler, who can deal only with actions, not with character, is competent to prescribe. Not the least of its advantages is that it treats the various evils as symptoms of a single malady and the problem as one and indivisible. The different aspects of the comprehensive reforms which he contemplates were unfolded to me by their author. A few of them have since passed through the Legislature and are inscribed on the statute book. Some are simple and mild, others heroic, but one and all they appear to be more or less what the country needs and what alone can extricate it—if statute laws and a sound educational system can extricate it—from the lamentable condition in which Carranza left it.

During that memorable journey to the United States General Obregón, when passing some of the numerous "stations" in which representatives of applied science were studying important agricultural, mining and other problems which will shortly confront his own country, might have reflected that half a century previously Mexico possessed an agricultural department considerably superior in every essential respect to anything of which the United States at that time disposed. And now—what a falling off! The General's attention, however, was directed principally to industrial enterprises that interested the army—for the world was then hypnotized by the great war. Had it been otherwise he would have admired the steady, silent, efficacious work that is being accomplished at the various "stations," where untiring research and painstaking experiments are shaping the conditions for great industrial

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enterprise and far-reaching mercantile venture : in Ohio by the staff of the oil “ station ” there ; in Montana and Arizona by specialists in copper mining ; in Salt Lake City and San Francisco by experts on silver and gold mining ; in Minnesota, where the technical methods of treating iron are being studied ; in Florida, where white phosphates are scientifically analysed ; and in Seattle, where skilled professors are busied perfecting hydro-electrical processes.

But if the Mexican traveller did not actually visit all those laboratories and experimental workshops where science is being made tributary to economic advancement, he heard of them, obtained an insight into their achievements, and perceived that many of the urgent problems with which his own country will soon have to grapple are identical with those which its progressive neighbours have already tackled and solved successfully. And he also knows—the hospitable representatives of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona left no doubt about this—that the results which cost them so much time, labour and money are entirely and gratuitously at the service of his country.

## CHAPTER XII

### A DOOMED REGIME

CARRANZA, having dropped his pilot, drifted shiftlessly hither and thither, inspirited only by the plaudits of his crew. The enterprise to which he had tasked himself was beyond the powers even of an experienced statesman, and he possessed neither experience nor statecraft. For the difficulties of the situation were deterrent.

If by a nation we understand a population which shares the same social customs and traditions, has undergone the same historical development and pursues a common ideal, then Mexico could not yet be said to have become a nation in the fullest sense of the term. Among her various ethnic elements there was no sharp consciousness of common thought, aim or aspirations. At no time in the past, except during the presidency of Juarez, had the popular will been focussed in the State, nor at any time since the declaration of independence had there been an earnest striving after national unity, outside a group of idealists who offered up their lives for an aim which the bulk of the population could hardly appreciate. No one can truly affirm that the masses were inspired in their relations, either to their own country or to foreign States, by conscious common ends. The history of independent Mexico was therefore that of a series of efforts on the part of genuine patriots or ambitious rulers, either to arouse that consciousness or to profit by its absence. With the exception of the former, who were few, the policy of the country had been inspired by interests, and for that reason those who originated or pursued it had done little else than quarrel among themselves. The nation as such had never incorporated any idea.

The State, too, was always a loose body apart, which seldom reflected a faithful picture of the people. The administration,

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like the army, was an instrument which could never be depended upon by the temporary Chief, whose success depended upon its efficacy. It generally broke in his hand. In order to keep it in good trim he often had to sacrifice a large part of the object which he was using it to accomplish. Many sections of the population had no admission to the ruling groups except through open rebellion. The only change effected under Carranza's regime lay in this, that the theory had been modified, and together with it the temper of the people. But the practice was as it had always been. And the will and the sentiments of the nation were, so to say, atomized.

Revolts and state-strokes being the recognized avenues to power, a Damocles' sword suspended by a hair threatened every ruler. And Carranza's efforts at home were directed towards preventing its fall. Hence part of his tactics was to play off one general against another. However loyal a military man might seem, however genuine his enthusiasm for the cause might appear, there was always, according to Carranza, a chink in his mind through which inspiration for the opposite cause might filter. The President suspected him of looking upon the chief whom he was serving to-day as the enemy whom he would be combating to-morrow. This explains Carranza's distrust of his most loyal supporters.

The conception of private property, owing to a variety of circumstances, had become considerably modified here and throughout the globe. National property was mainly a source for the enrichment or the maintenance of the privileged group. The Catholic religion was treated as a vice that might be indulged in on the quiet, but must not be flaunted openly in the face of the world. Laws were only for those who were not members of the freemasonry of power. There were hardly any deterrents to crime except the death penalty, and that had but little force against temptation and opportunity which were ubiquitous. The entire social organization was breaking up, and the direction imparted to its processes was the reverse of normal evolution. The general tendency was to lower all moral and intellectual values.

But there were also psychological as well as historical and ethnic traits which hindered the Mexican population from becoming a nation—self-conscious, self-willed and single-minded—as every people should be on all matters of supreme moment

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to the entire community. And chief among those were its ingrained lack of cohesiveness. The units, unlike those, say, of the British, Bulgarian or Japanese people, had theretofore shown themselves incapable of combining for a common constructive purpose, social or political. And even when the object held out to them for attainment possessed all the attractions of personal interest, as in the case of industrial enterprises, they seemed to need the cement of foreign participation to keep them together.

Now that is a capital defect in a people. It renders continuous whole-hearted co-operation, and therefore the highest kind of national organization, almost impossible. The State organs do not respond to the governmental brain; they move convulsively and often against the will of the guiding centre. For purposes of destruction there had been from time to time loose agglomerations of individuals, whose only bond of union was the desire to pull down existing fabrics and institutions for selfish ends. And once the work was done, sometimes before it was completed, they fell out among themselves, formed new and ever-changing groups, like the figures in a kaleidoscope, until they were disintegrated and reduced to their primitive conditions of units.

The Mexican—whether he be Indian, mestizo, or of Spanish stock—is possessed by a profound and grounded distrust of strangers, and even of his fellow citizens from other parts of the Republic. It is only in the domain of the family and in cases of friendship that this aloofness is overcome. The family was the largest smoothly working organism in the Republic before the last revolution. The nation was hardly more than an abstract idea. Democratic principles existed only on paper. The regime was dictatorial. Governors of States, instead of being elected by the people, were appointed by the President. And as the spirit and letter of the Constitution were systematically violated, so too were the spirit and the letter of the laws. The relations of the business world to the authorities were regulated, not so much by the statutes, as by ingenious evasion of these. Graft—as bribery is now termed—was the tunnel through which alone a passage was feasible through mountains of legal hindrances, and those who passed through it were legion.

In fairness to Carranza it should be borne in mind that

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his intermeddling in the domestic arrangements of the Mexican States may be explained if not justified on the ground that the alternative was utter confusion. The sovereignty of the various federal units, considering their lack of self-restraint and political backwardness, is a plague-spot which will probably never disappear until the State fabric is centralized. Every Mexican President has had to grapple with the abuses which it engendered, and each one adopted the method most congenial to his own temperament. Carranza's device was not more reprehensible than those of his predecessors, but his aims were more mixed and incongruous.

General and political education will doubtless do much to lessen these evils, and it is being systematically applied by Obregón. But a complete cure without eradicating the cause seems impossible.

Despite Carranza's uncompromising expedients, he never succeeded in uniting all the States under his rule, and even those which acknowledged his sway in general were often refractory when their interests appeared to be at stake. In Puebla, for example, he was unable to enforce obedience to his peremptory and repeated commands that the rights of the neighbouring State of Oaxaca should be respected.\* Thereupon Oaxaca withdrew from the federal union, resumed its independence,† and revived the Constitution of 1857. And some years later, when I was about to travel across the Sierra from Oaxaca to Salina Cruz, I had to apply to the anti-Carranzist General Mexueiro for a safe-conduct.

North of Veracruz the rebel Felix Diaz was in arms against the Government. General Pelaez, another rebel, occupied the rich district around Tampico, and was paid a regular salary by the rich oil companies there, who were eager to see him rise to the presidency. In Yucatan, once a most prosperous State, bolshevism of the most destructive kind was being violently imposed upon the population, against whom hideous crimes were being perpetrated daily in the name of humanitarian principles. Lower California was being

\* When Carranza ordered the authorities of Puebla to allow those of Oaxaca to transport the corn they had purchased in the former State, his own military representative refused. He seized the consignment and used it for his own purposes.

† On June 3rd, 1915.

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governed by a separatist named Cantu, who left nothing undone to win the approval of North Americans, in view of the day when he would rise against the Central Government. Villa was devastating the country in Chihuahua. Life and property were eminently insecure. Trains never ran at night. Even in the daytime they had to be accompanied by military escorts, and in spite of these they were frequently blown up. Brigandage flourished everywhere in the zones between the Carranzist and the rebel forces. Costly blockhouses had to be erected along the principal railroads. Districts, towns and public communications frequently changed hands, and at each occupation by the various armies the unfortunate dwellers in the neighbourhood were mulcted anew. The air was thick with rumours of conspiracies and rebellions, and people at last began to console themselves with the reflection that things were so bad that they could only become better.

The administration of justice was a tragi-comedy of the worst kind. Civil cases of importance dragged on for years, like the typical suit of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*. Bribes were offered by litigants, and even asked for by judges whose names were freely bandied about. Law-abiding individuals recoiled from the tribunals, and resigned themselves to serious losses rather than throw good money after bad.

Science, art, education, hygiene, public works, and all the material aids to national and individual culture, well-being and self-respect were neglected. Production, which is one of the indispensable conditions of progress, was arrested. The elementary tasks of government were scamped. And all this merely in order to enable a band of parasites to prey upon a long-suffering and patient people. Some of the "democrats" who now rolled along the streets in their costly motor-cars were self-made men who worshipped their maker, socialists who when they had owned nothing in the world were ready to share everything with the people and now that they had acquired wealth and power were lavish only of restrictions.

In those days I visited the wretched huts of many waifs and strays of the population in towns and villages, and the impressions I gathered there haunt me still. Whole families were to be found huddled together in one fetid room or in a filthy courtyard undergoing with sluggish endurance the



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agonies of a lingering death—one individual from leprosy, another from consumption, a third from malaria or typhoid or enteric fever. The stoical temper of the average Mexican served but as a foil to sharpen the lines of the ghastly picture of mouldering bodies and withering souls. . . .

In lieu of redeeming his numerous promises of national reconstruction and bettering the lot of the masses, Carranza had made the Republic a Moslems' paradise for himself and the circle of drones who surrounded him, and a hell for the rest of the people.

But in shaping Mexico's intercourse with foreign Powers he conceived a definite policy, of which the object was as praiseworthy as the methods of attaining it were incongruous. He aimed, as we saw, at winning for the Republic the position of head of the Latin-American races, and erecting an effectual barrier against further encroachments on the rights of these by the United States. But most of his tactics defeated, and were certain to defeat, the end he had in view.

To become the soul and the brain of a vast politico-racial movement was an object capable of tempting and enlisting his ambition. If successful, it would confer upon his country the moral leadership of Latin America and the laying of the vague, dread spectre of the Monroe Doctrine. And he drew encouragement from President Wilson's utterance that "all governments of America stand, so far as we are concerned, upon a footing of genuine equality and unquestioned independence."\* This declaration pulverized all the sophistries woven out of the Monroe Doctrine, and disconcerted its amateur interpreters in the Senate. But in the United States one President contradicts another, and sometimes undoes his work, so that one can never tell which of them speaks the mind of the people.

Carranza's Latin-American scheme—the one element which lent consistency to his policy—shaped itself mainly in two measures: propaganda of a clumsy character in the South American Republics, and friendship which almost hardened into an alliance with the Kaiser's Government after the outbreak of the world war.

But he was a poor psychologist, and his treatment of his fellow-men wrecked his every venture. From the first he evinced an inveterate dislike of everything and everybody in

\* President Wilson's Message to Congress, December 7th, 1915.

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the United States, except a few Nonconformist preachers, and he never subsequently by act or word showed that he had modified this irrational sentiment. When President Wilson granted him a favour Carranza announced it to the people as a victory of Mexican diplomacy pitted against the State Department of Washington.\* When Mr. Wilson, whose Mexican policy was inscrutable and indefensible, assured a number of Press men that under no conceivable circumstances would the United States resort to arms for the settlement of any misunderstanding with a weaker nation, Carranza disclosed to the Press the contents of a minatory Note received from Washington a short time before which was in flat contradiction to the assurance of Mr. Wilson.

Throughout the wearisome controversy between the two Republics originating in the new principle adopted by Mexico respecting the ownership of oil wells and lands, President Carranza was needlessly aggressive in form and seldom explicit in matter. Nor can it be forgotten by his countrymen that there was a period when he had it in his power to have a damp sponge drawn across the slate and all former mistakes and misunderstandings deleted by applying those equitable measures which his two successors afterwards adopted without effect, and that he allowed the opportunity to slip by unutilized, to the lasting detriment of his country. On the other side, there is a good deal to be said about the provocation which Mexico received from the United States, and the impossibility of knowing what to expect from the Governments of that great Republic, no two of which profess the same principles or pursue the same policy. At one moment President Wilson repudiated the idea that the United States would ever intervene in Mexico :

"It is none of my business and it is none of yours," he said, "how long they (the Mexican people) take in determining what their Government should be. It is none of my business and it is none of yours how they go about the business. The country is theirs. The Government is theirs. Have not European nations taken as long as they wanted, and spilt as much blood as they pleased in settling their affairs? And

\* In consequence of an agreement between General González and the United States Ambassador, Fletcher, the latter induced his Government to release some millions of pounds of ammunition, as an act of friendship, and Carranza bruited the matter abroad as a fine stroke of Mexican diplomacy.

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shall we deny that to Mexico because she is weak? No, I say.”\*

But five months later the same President, in a Note to Carranza, said: “I therefore call upon the leaders of Mexico to act. . . . If they cannot accommodate their differences and unite for this great purpose within a very short time, this Government will be constrained to decide what means should be employed by the United States in order to help Mexico save herself and serve her people.”†

In the following year Mexico was invaded by federal troops from the United States, as has been pointed out in another chapter, for the purpose of capturing Villa, without any declaration of war.

On a previous occasion Huerta, who had been refused recognition as President by the United States Government, was informed that *as President* he must have the United States flag saluted, to make amends for the arrest of two American officers and marines!

Neither in Mexico nor elsewhere was there anyone who could say with certainty whether the authorized exponent of the policy of the United States was the President or the State Department, or any individual or institution, what that policy was or what attitude had best be assumed towards the conflicting measures in which it fitfully revealed itself. It is a curious and a demonstrable fact that the White House suggested to certain foreign diplomatists the advisability of recognizing the Mexican Government at the very time when the State Department in Washington was employing argument and suasion on the opposite side. It would be hard to discover a parallel to this state of things in the recent history of diplomacy.

The outbreak of the world war confronted Carranza with a perplexing problem, largely of his own making. His friendship with the Germans might, he thought, contribute to the success of his great Latin-American scheme. He believed in their ultimate success, and would fain profit by that. But when the United States entered the arena, the question was pressed upon him from outside in various tones: Would Mexico follow the lead of the Northern Republic, or would she join the Germans?

\* Speech delivered at Indianapolis on January 8th, 1915.

† Note dated June 2nd, 1915.

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That she declined to make common cause with her powerful neighbour was natural. The grounds for this decision were superlatively cogent. If, as appeared probable, the war went on for several years her resources would be utterly exhausted in the costly venture. Bankruptcy and financial bondage would follow. Besides, General Pershing, who had recently invaded Mexico at the head of some thousand armed men, was the Commander of the United States troops in Europe, and would have been also the military chief of the Mexican Army. And that was a hindrance. Another was the necessity, which could not be evaded, of surrendering Mexican finances to United States management. And this could not be contemplated by any President or Dictator, however lax in other respects he might be. In a word, one cannot fairly find fault with Mexico's declaration of neutrality.

But there was also serious talk of her entering the lists on Germany's side. The amazing Zimmerman Note was delivered to Carranza, suggesting an alliance with Japan against the United States, from whom Mexico should wrest back Texas, New Mexico and Arizona! The Germans were lavish of promises, seemingly so seductive that even Carranza felt tempted to give way and cast the die.

It was while the beam was still trembling that Obregón threw his weight and that of the army behind him into the balance and uttered his veto against the proposed alliance. To Carranza's emphatic assurances that Germany could be relied on to obtain for Mexico the promised territory and prestige Obregón replied: "Germany, like the clergyman at the bedside of the dying man, will recommend our country to the mercies of Providence. That, and nothing more." The interview in which these weighty words were uttered disposes of the statement which was at one time current in the United States, that Obregón was a rabid pro-German.

In the meanwhile domestic conditions were bearing fruit. Discontent was taking ominous shape. The Constitution was derided. Public moneys were being embezzled. Young favourites were quickly growing rich and openly leading lives of Roman luxury unredeemed by Roman taste. Trade and industry, with the exception of the oil enterprises, were stagnant and uncertainty paralysed initiative.

I had a long conversation with Carranza on these subjects

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at the time, and found him blind to fact and impervious to argument. What made the deepest impression on my mind, however, was his confidence in the stability of his regime, and the ultimate success of his policy. And he founded that trust largely on the belief that Great Britain and France would champion Mexico against the United States, notwithstanding the circumstance that on October 27th, 1913, the British Foreign Office had announced that it would take no steps in Mexico without previously consulting the State Department in Washington.

It is interesting to note how men placed at the head of States which they are incapable of governing are also incapable of discerning the fruits of their misrule. No keen-eyed observer of the trend of events in Mexico could fail to perceive whither these were tending. Certain of the questions which I put to Carranza in March, 1920, like those which I submitted to the Premier of Portugal, Texeiro de Souza, a few days before the revolution which overturned the monarchy in that ill-fated country, left no doubt in the minds of either of those men that I anticipated grave complications and the outbreak of a widespread revolt. But Carranza assured me that never before had the relations between Mexico and the United States been so cordial as they then were; that the few outstanding differences would be shortly cleared up by a mixed commission, which he had already proposed to the White House; and, as for the internal situation, that if there should be dissatisfaction in Mexico at the result of the presidential elections then imminent, it would be local and would at most assume the form of riots, which would be speedily suppressed. I felt sorry for Carranza and more so for the people of Mexico, whose destinies he was endeavouring to rough-hew.

So sharp and well defined were the shadows of the coming conflict that some shrewd onlookers in the United States made an accurate guess at the kind of change which they portended. Even in the dense and heated atmosphere of Mexico there were a few individuals of penetrating discernment who also gauged with tolerable accuracy the nature of the forces that were about to be released, the imminence of their operation and the direction towards which they would tend. The average citizen, however, like the bulk of the politicians, beheld nothing but the smooth surface. Of the black swift currents

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underneath he had no inkling. Thus I was assured by Mexican Conservatives, whose aims, duties and position should have sharpened their sight and awakened their misgivings, that Carranza was about to attain his goal, perpetuate his system and go down to history as one of Mexico's greatest rulers.

"He is our only man; there is no other," they repeated dolefully, "and we must stand by him."

Meanwhile political revolts and outrages by bandits became more frequent. The generals to whom the task of suppressing these scourges was entrusted never displaced them, and were suspected of conniving at their perpetuation for their own personal ends. Zapata's bands continued their depredations until General Pablo González, by means of an act of treachery which scandalized all Mexico, had him lured into a trap and put to death.

Villa became more active than ever. Carranza at last harboured the amazing plan of constructing blockhouses along all the railway lines, in order to diminish the danger of travelling. Finally General Felipe Angeles, the professional soldier who had been first Villa's and then Carranza's military adviser, fulfilled Obregón's prediction, and having organized the "Liberal Alliance," entered Mexico, and unfurled the banner of revolution, but was arrested, court-martialled and shot.

Carranza rejoiced at these partial successes, and was deaf to the ground swell of revolution, which was noted as an omen by the few who had ears to hear. He was likewise blind to the symptoms of growing impatience in the United States. He had steered the State ship into a death-dealing whirlpool, and the only question was whether it would be sucked into the deeps by Charybdis or shattered on the rocks of Scylla.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THREE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

OBREGÓN as a private citizen was nowise indifferent to the trend of Carranza's policies, the effects of which could no longer be ignored. For believing firmly in the joint responsibility of every individual for the condition of the whole community, he shaped his conduct congruously with this belief. Furthermore, he had won for himself such a high place in the estimation of his articulate countrymen that his judgment as an arbitrator was sought and accepted by various contending parties, who would otherwise have had recourse to violence and bloodshed. Of this disposition he more than once took advantage to prevent sinister breaches of the public peace.

The first opportunity of this kind presented itself in the State of Sinaloa, where two candidates for the governorship—both generals—had come forward for election: Angel Flores, an intimate friend of his own, and General Iturbe. The former was the most popular man in the State, and would probably have been elected had he become a candidate at the outset of the campaign. But he had refused to stand, and did not change his mind until General Iturbe had obtained the support of a majority of the voters, including many of Flores' political friends. Then he presented himself as a candidate and was defeated. He took this reverse so much to heart that he and some of his followers refused to abide by the result, and made ready in traditional fashion to oppose the new Governor and to employ force against him. Unhappily that is what still frequently takes place in various sovereign States of the Mexican Union after the elections for governorship, and it will tax President Obregón's ingenuity to the utmost to devise an efficacious remedy for it.\*

\* Since then there have been three rival parliaments in Tamaulipas, as many governors in the State of Tabasco, and two in Michoacan, to say nothing of Yucatan, where chaos and confusion prevailed.

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As soon as it became obvious that Flores was intent on appealing to arms, Obregón sent a message to President Carranza offering to mediate. He was anxious to avert further bloodshed, and also to save his friend Flores from the obloquy of plunging the country into civil war anew. Carranza closed with the offer, and the two rivals agreed to abide by the proposed arbitration. Flores was then in Culiacán\* and Iturbe in Hermosillo.† Obregón on his way passed through the little town of San Blas, and was standing one evening in the porch of an hotel, together with two friends, when a thunderstorm of unprecedented fury burst over the place. The lightning struck the building, passed through a disused gas pipe, knocked down the General and dazed his companions. But he was soon himself again and a firmer believer in his luck than ever.

In Culiacán Obregón saw Flores, and persuaded him to accept his defeat as a natural consequence of the conditions under which it was inflicted, for which he had only himself to blame, and offered him a piece of land in Sonora, which he invited him to cultivate while waiting for the dawn of better days. The invitation was accepted, the danger of bloodshed was exorcized, and Flores has since had ample grounds for satisfaction.‡

While Obregón was attending to his private affairs in Sonora and Sinaloa, events were gradually shaping a situation which was to try Carranza and his administration with fire and bring into sharpest relief the latent traits of his warped character and cramped intelligence. Although thoroughly conversant with the history of his own country and familiar with books about foreign climes, he was living in an unreal land peopled with personages of his own creation, weaving unfeasible schemes, devising impracticable plans to defeat fancied intrigues and real machinations.

But it was not until the presidential elections loomed in sight that the second and most momentous period of Obregón's career began. That fateful event, the touchstone alike of Carranza's sincerity and the nation's temper, was looked

\* The capital of Sinaloa.

† The capital of Sonora.

‡ He afterwards became Governor of Sinaloa, where I became acquainted with him.



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forward to with trepidation by all who had the well-being of the Republic at heart. For they knew that the political as well as the social and economic future of the country depended largely upon the outcome and upon the circumstances in which that would be wrought out. Mexico had already had nine presidents in ten years, and of the forty-seven who had occupied the presidential chair since the days of Iturbide,\* no fewer than thirty-one were military men. The transmission of power in the Republic had been frequently effected by violence and cynical illegality, and nearly everybody apprehended that these methods would now be tried anew. Carranza alone professed to be sanguine. He boasted that this time the process of choosing the First Magistrate would challenge the admiration of the world. It would be a true expression of the popular will unhampered by undue influences. He would also undertake to leave no sinister legacy, in the shape of international entanglements, to his successor.

But his words fell upon deaf ears. The forecast was too cheering to be true and the prophet too discredited to be believed. And yet people felt that unless his promise were redeemed Mexico's history might undergo a tremendous break of continuity with incalculable and disastrous consequences to the Republic.

The people of the United States were keenly and distrustfully scrutinizing every token of Carranza's intentions and of the temper of the revolutionary class. For between the two countries relations had for a long while past been painfully tense. English-speaking pioneers who had discovered and developed Mexico's mineral wealth, risking capital, labour and life in the research and exploitation, had in some cases lost all three in the turmoil of civil war. And not only had this reckless internecine strife deprived many law-abiding foreigners of house, home and industrial plant, but peaceful legislation threatened to become an instrument for taking away from the others property rights acquired under a previous administration.

To these grievances no remedy had been applied, nor was there a noticeable intention on the part of the Government to devise any. Various corporations, industrial, financial and political, were working hard to stir up mischief and make

\* 28th September, 1821.

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out a case for intervention. At last the State Department of Washington seemed resolved to accept the moral "mission" with which various vested interests had entrusted it. And it was felt by intelligent observers that the time-interval before the expiry of Mr. Wilson's term of office was but a period of grace, during which Mexico must set her house in order unless she were resigned to abandon the task to outsiders. And her first step towards amendment would be to conduct the elections pacifically and transmit the presidential powers without bloodshed or iniquitous chicane. This, however, appeared to some an unattainable ideal and to others an impossible sacrifice.

The elections were at first fixed for June, 1920, and down to the end of May of the preceding year no preparations had been made for the contest. This was natural. The political groups, half dead and alive, were in no hurry to appoint their strongest men to the dangerous position of presidential candidates, and it was taken for granted that no public worker would be self-assertive enough to come forward and offer himself for the presidency without the hall-mark of their approval. But General Obregón, true to his approved methods, delivered the first attack when it was least expected. He issued a Manifesto\* to the nation, flinging party precedents and formalities to the winds and administering a rousing shock to the drowsy community. Truly it was a momentous step—in some sort a crossing of the Rubicon—and its consequences to himself and the country were destined to be far-ranging.

The document, printed on coarse paper, was in form passably conventional; in substance it was the diagnosis of a terrible malady by a conscientious physician, who believed that if given a fair chance he could treat it with a favourable issue, and who, being also somewhat of a moralist, felt impelled by a sense of duty to move every lever in order to secure that fair chance.

Obregón's analysis of Mexican politics was scathingly severe, scrupulously faithful, and fully adequate to warrant his resolve to hold aloof from its various recognized camps. The political field, he stated, is held by two parties, the Conservatives, who are intent upon perpetuating those evils of the past which have survived into the present, and the Liberals,

\* In Nogales, Sonora, on June 1st, 1919.

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who, while gazing upwards at lofty ideals, stumble into ditches and mud-holes and take to belabouring each other there. Many of their leaders are venal. They acquire prestige and influence at the head of an army, and then rush with indecent haste to barter these advantages for power and pelf. If, in spite of this, the Liberal party triumphed in the past, it was because the rank and file were ready to give their lives for an idea, whereas the Conservatives are incapable of soaring to such heroic heights. So sure is he that the instinct of the common people is sound, and that they can distinguish aright between their friends and their enemies, that he entreats his own followers to put no pressure whatever upon their neighbours and to make no political conversions.

“Let each constituent vote according to his lights, and I will abide by the upshot.”

But to this rule the Government and its branches must also rigorously conform. No support must be given by the administration to any candidate under the pretext that he is best fitted to carry on the beneficial plans which it had to leave unfinished owing to the expiry of its term of office.

“As if,” he adds epigrammatically, “the task of a ruler could ever be said to be completed.”

Now this was sacred ground on which it was dangerous to tread. But Obregón expressed himself without beating about the bush. Knowing Carranza, however, he doubted the efficacy of a simple appeal, and, therefore, strengthened it with a warning, which was also a prophecy.

“The historic personality of the First Chief of the Constitutional Army,” he writes, “is in danger if, despite the unquestionable energy and dexterity with which he overcame the more formidable hindrances to success, his work should prove barren; if it should present as its outcome only the bitter fruits matured by all previous revolutions; if, in a word, the country should be bereft of the right to emancipate itself from its emancipators.”

Such outspokenness always reflects credit upon a cause, and often inflicts harm upon the leader who indulges in it. To Carranza it was gall and wormwood. He hated plain speaking about himself, and he laid up his wrath against the plain speaker.

“Obregón,” he afterwards told General Calles, “is im-

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possible as a candidate, because of his aggressive posture towards us.”\* Those words offer a fair indication of his resolve to perpetuate his policy after his withdrawal from office. And this determination inspired the fatal line of action which culminated in his overthrow.

But what were Obregón’s reform proposals ? With which parties was he disposed to throw in his lot ? With none. He declined to bind his hands in advance. His principles, he asserted, were known to all ; the way in which he had striven to apply them was also a matter of common knowledge. Let these data guide the electors, who might then give or deny him their confidence and a free hand.

“ I make no promises of any kind whatsoever, within the frontiers of the Republic or without.”

And this was one of the most noteworthy conditions under which he was raised by the popular vote to the highest position in the land. What it implied has never been set forth in words. But apparently it signified among other things that the people would entrust him with the task of rescuing the Republic from the ruin that was overtaking it, and would leave to him the choice of ways and means within broad constitutional limits. One of the reasons which the candidate gave for dispensing with reform schemes he outlined thus :

“ The people care nothing for programmes which, in last analysis, are little better than rhymed prose. What they lay stress on are deeds . . . and my antecedents alone shall serve as a basis for the judgment both of those who are minded to support me and of those who think fit to oppose me.”

The problems which press for solution are, he adds, of two kinds, one belonging to the moral and the other to the political order. “ It is about the former that I am most solicitous,” he adds, “ because without morality for your groundwork you will get no problem rightly settled.”

To language of that kind the politicians of Mexico were wholly unaccustomed. It was startlingly new, nay, it was, as Carranza put it, “ aggressive,” and could not be brooked by professional place hunters of the school of use and wont, and still less by a Government whose plans it threatened to upset. But it revealed Obregón as a man, a palpable reality among the

\* *Orientación*, 29th April, 1920. This periodical published General Calles’ account of the conversation from which I have given the extract.

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shifting phantasms of aimless impulse and sordid velleities that clouded the political stage. He, at least, claimed to know what his country needed and how to satisfy its wants. If he lacked a cut-and-dry programme, he at least sketched a lofty conception of general reform and declared himself ready to apply it in his own way. He then offers himself to the people :

“Having issued this Manifesto I come forward . . . and say to the Nation : I am a candidate for the post of President of the Republic in the forthcoming electoral campaign. I make no promises of any kind whatsoever, within the frontiers of the Republic or without. Neither shall I wait to draft a programme freighted with illusions which would only serve to advertise me.”

What he required of the administration was perfectly meet and legal ; that it should abstain from taking sides against him. And it was, as we have seen in the case of his brother José, exactly the course which he himself had steadfastly pursued when he was in office and was tempted to use his influence in favour of friends and relatives.

On affairs of international moment, of which, to my thinking, he had but a faint and imperfect conception, the Manifesto touches lightly but, as it seemed to its author, adequately. Demanding respect for Mexico's sovereignty and promising reciprocity to her neighbours, he undertook to see that all rights legitimately acquired in the Republic by foreigners should be respected and might be freely exercised, that capital from abroad should have free scope in developing the wealth of the country, and that the nationals of other States might fully enjoy the rights and guarantees accorded to them by the laws.

That was a noteworthy advance in the right direction. Under Carranza's regime and while Mr. Woodrow Wilson was in power in the United States, such a declaration, followed by its practical corollaries, would have served as a broad bridge between the two Republics over which trade, commerce and diplomatic intercourse would have assumed normal proportions, for the benefit of both. But yesterday's infallible remedy often becomes a useless drug to-day, and the crushing weight of Carranza's legacy had yet to be realized.

The kernel of the Manifesto lay in Obregón's aloofness from parties and his stand on his own merits and qualities. On

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that ground he asked the people to bestow on him their confidence and together with that the decisive control of the national policy. For he rightly held that on no less broad a basis could he hope to tackle the problem of reconstruction successfully. What strikes the foreign observer most forcibly in all this are his quiet steadfastness of purpose, his breadth and loftiness of motive and his indifference to the decorative aspects of power.

The Manifesto came as a poignant shock to all political centres from one end of the Republic to the other. For it connoted a violent break with some of their cherished formalities ; and form is still worshipped in Mexico as in Spain. Here was an outsider whose services, hardly known to, and imperfectly appreciated by, the bulk of the population, were mostly of a military order, coming forward without the usual presentation by a political group, asking for the highest post in the State and censuring the leaders of the only party strong enough to comply with his demand. Even Obregón's friends were scandalized by the historic document and the author's "lack of modesty."

The Press resented both and uttered its strictures in very incisive language. For Obregón has never had what is commonly known as "a good Press." Some organs alluded to the electoral address as Napoleonic. Others blamed the General for not waiting to be adopted by a party, a third set reproached him for dissociating himself from the organized political groups, and one and all took exception to his contemptuous remarks upon electoral programmes. One caustic publicist agreed with and summed up the view taken by the bulk of the politicians in the limelight as follows: "General Obregón's Napoleonic pronouncement is garnished with all the ermine and all the bees of the imperial mantle."\* Several daily papers referred to the General as the coming Dictator.† His book‡ was also virulently criticized and ironically compared with Cæsar's Commentaries by writers whose remarks indicated that they had not perused it. "Pompey González, Cæsar Obregón" was the headline of an article in the most widely read

\* Jesus Urueta in *El Universal* of July 4th, 1920. Obregón had this critic, who was an excellent diplomatist, appointed soon afterwards to be Mexican Minister in the Argentine.

† *El Universal*, 9th July and later in the same month.

‡ "A Campaign of Eight Thousand Kilometres."

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newspaper of the Republic.\* It was evident that his remarkable Manifesto had the effect of a high explosive suddenly bursting among a crowd of gaping dawdlers. It startled the public and made men think and feel and resolve. Disclosing with rare lucidity the channels in which events were moving, it stung people to a poignant sense of impending danger. For it was at once a description of the past, a condemnation of the present and a prophecy of the future—a prophecy which has since come true in several particulars.

Nearly all Obregón's critics took their stand on the question of form.

But beneath the surface there was something more, something which the public never discerned and does not know even to this day. It was this: Carranza, aware of Obregón's popularity and of his loyalty to the revolutionary ideals, had been turning over in his mind the advantages he might reap if he could only harness these forces to his own chariot and attach the General permanently to his cause. In fact, he had gone so far as to make definite overtures to Obregón, and to propose a conference with him on the subject. But the General declined to bind himself to any political group, nay, he refused even to allow himself to be supported by the Administration; he, therefore, rejected the offer of a conference. An amusing consequence of this abortive manœuvre was the naïve zeal with which one of the daily newspapers advocated his candidature at the outset, in the belief that he had closed with Carranza's proposal and was the official favourite, and then attacked him with reinforced bitterness when the truth was revealed.

The Manifesto, published when the fortunes of the Republic were at the lowest ebb, operated as the line of cleavage between Carranza and the military leader who had raised him to the presidency. Thenceforward the two men were sundered by an abyss.

So powerfully were people stirred that Obregón was challenged by the hostile and undecided elements and entreated by some of his friends to modify certain passages of the Manifesto so as to make them less unpalatable to the taste of the old timers. They urged that it was merely a matter of tactics, which would bind him to nothing. But he refused to alter a sentence because he meant everything he had said and was

\* *El Universal*, July 24th, 1919.

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minged to do all that was promised or implied in the document.

Fierce currents were now running. General Pablo González, the supposed favourite of Carranza, strove at one moment to ensnare, at another to exasperate, his political opponent, but Obregón was too wary to fall into the traps and too placid to lose his temper, however bitter the onslaught. One of González' devices was to propose publicly that both candidates should make a compact to conduct themselves during the elections with decency and to respect the law.

"I have been doing that all my life," was Obregón's reply, "and I consider it undignified to suggest to me a pledge which would imply the contrary."\*

And public opinion was with him. His opponent's next move was even more unfortunate: he accused Obregón of having contemplated disloyalty to Carranza in the past. But all the witnesses whom he named in support of the charge denied the allegation emphatically and damaged the accuser very sensibly.

It is fair to say that Obregón himself once trespassed on forbidden ground. He undertook to prefer an accusation against his rival and to make it good with documentary evidence, but when challenged to carry out his threat, he drew back on the ground that it would be unfair to his antagonist, who, being in military service, was forbidden by law to defend himself.†

General Pablo González was, as we saw, now believed to be Carranza's candidate,‡ and as one day the two had a private conversation which lasted eight hours, the notion speedily took root. Shortly afterwards González caused a great stir by announcing to the Press that he was ready, should he deem it necessary, to use his troops to close the doors of the legislature.§ This Cromwellian threat wrought him further harm,

\* *El Universal*, July 11th, 1919.

† *El Universal*, July 26th, 1919. It is just to add that, as we shall see later on, he possessed documents calculated to disqualify for all time, not only González, but also another of his opponents and rivals, Robles Domínguez. But he magnanimously refused to disclose them until long after he had taken his seat as President of the Republic. His mistake was to allude to them without pursuing the matter further.

‡ *El Monitor Republicano*, August, 1919.

§ *El Monitor*, October 28rd, 1919.



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as did also his part in the treacherous murder of the rebel Zapata, which disgraced a few and benefited the many.\*

During those preliminary skirmishes a rumour was suddenly launched that Carranza was casting about for a third candidate, who began to be spoken about mysteriously by some of the President's friends as the Messiah who would save the country. The truth would seem to be that Señor Carranza's resolve had been fixed in that sense ever since the issue of Obregón's Manifesto. Keen interest, however, mingled with resentment, was aroused, and curiosity became intense to learn whom the President would nominate for his successor. One day a newspaper disclosed the name: Señor Ignacio Bonillas, the Mexican Ambassador in Washington.† This report came from Querétaro, where Carranza was then staying, and as it was evidently authoritative, it carried conviction and caused intense surprise. For Bonillas was unknown in Mexico except to a very few, and some of these were convinced that he was a nationalized American citizen. The rumour, however, proved true.

The position thus cleared up, each of the protagonists took to playing his own part in the contest, that of the President being to ensure the defeat of the two candidates, Obregón and González, by every means in his power. Nobody doubted that by using these to the full he could accomplish his purpose, but many feared that the experiment would be followed by grave consequences to all concerned.

\* General Guajardo, acting under González' orders, lured and killed Zapata by a nefarious act of perfidy.

† *México Nuevo*, 23rd October, 1919.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CARRANZA SETS A DEATH TRAP

LITTLE doubt was entertained by those who had friends in the National Palace that Carranza's decision to set up an official candidate was taken immediately after the publication of Obregón's Manifesto.\* But he had kept his own counsel. His subordinates, however, were allowed a free hand, and they left nothing undone to intimidate the would-be supporters of Obregón by punishing his known friends. One day General Guajardo, Zapata's assassin, hearing that Colonel Peña and Captain Avila were both Obregónists, ordered them to shout "Viva Pablo González," and as they refused, he shot them dead, and then coolly pleaded that he had acted "in defence of the social interests of the community."†

The Municipality of Mexico City dismissed several officials for being partisans of Obregón.‡ In San Luis Potosí the Obregónist party was so brutally repressed that its leaders requested protection from the central authorities. In one town an old man was hung up by the feet for two hours for canvassing for Obregón, and later on was hanged by the neck, but cut down before strangulation ensued.§ Generals were removed from their command because of their loyalty to their former commander;|| orderly meetings were dispersed by

\* Already in July the *Excelsior* hinted at the advent of a third "independent and free" candidate, and a little later *El Monitor Republicano* expressed the fear that Carranza would hinder the freedom of election and support a candidate of his own. (6th August, 1919.)

† *Monitor Republicano*, 23rd September, 1919.

‡ *El Monitor Republicano*, September 24th, 1919.

§ In Cosamaloapan. The man who gave the order was Major Benitez and it was carried out on October 15th, 1919.

|| For ex-General Méndez in Colima cf. *El Monitor Republicano*, December 6th, 1919.

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the police ; curious devices were resorted to in order to hinder General Obregón from touring the country ;\* the secretary of an Obregónist club was assassinated by federal troops.†

By the month of October many of the political groups in the country had offered their support to Obregón, who opened his electoral campaign‡ with a simple speech, which gained for him the good will of the working classes in the North.

It would be easy to draw up a political programme, almost a theory of government, from Obregón's electoral addresses, but they seldom contain biographical data. The pronouncement with which he inaugurated his political campaign in Nogales before a vast and sympathetic audience is a noteworthy exception, and the pithy way in which he there summarizes his whole life, as though he had ever borne in mind the old maxim, *respice finem*, will bear quoting :

“ When misery dragged me from school, forcing me to cast around for a means of livelihood, duty prompted me to become a carpenter, and accordingly I plied the hand-saw and took back to my home the bread that I earned by the sweat of my brow. When my toil and my night watches made me master of a workshop I treated all those who were under me with brotherly regard and kindheartedness, while at the same time I discharged my duties towards my employers. Later on it pleased my fellow citizens to confer upon me the post of President of the Municipal Council, and I believe that, within my sphere of action and the limits of my faculties, I did my duty towards them. Afterwards, the country needing a soldier, I became a soldier forthwith, and throughout my military career in armed camps the fortune of war enabled me to triumph. My soldiers made of their chief a comrade whom they ever esteemed, and he in turn treated them as it behoves a chief to treat his subalterns, sharing with them victories and reverses.

“ A passing weakness which came over me for the first time in my life prompted me to seek in South America a haven of rest from political strife, but as fate willed it, that illusive dream, which I cherished for several months, was not to be

\* Cf. *El Monitor Republicano*, March 17th, 1920.

† Under Colonel Ramírez in Zinapécuaro (Michoacán).

‡ On October 27th, 1919, he left Nogales for that purpose.

## Carranza sets a Death Trap

realized, whereupon I once more hearken to the voice of duty, and coming before my fellow citizens to-day, I say to them: All my good will and all my energies are at the service of the Nation, if it believes that at the present conjuncture these can save the country from falling into the hands of a group of unscrupulous men of ambition, who would turn justice into a source of speculation and make of our national dignity a rag."

Many of the working men had, with Carranza's connivance, been plied with communistic ideas by professional agitators, and their notions about capital, labour and brains were simple, false and dangerous. I heard orators in the States of Veracruz, Campeche and elsewhere, tell General Obregón that they expected when he came into power to see the heads of the wealthy roll down at their feet and capital driven clean out of the Republic. The candidate did not leave these day-dreamers under any illusion as to his own ideas on the subject. At the very outset of his tour\* he said:

"If we were to fall foul of the enterprises which have been built up by brains, toil and money we should find ourselves at loggerheads with civilization. Travel about the Republic and you will come across hamlets and villages in which the only source of artificial light is oil, or even tallow candles, whereas the principal cities and towns have electricity. Now, is it reasonable to wish to demolish the electric plant of those towns and cities in a spirit of equality misunderstood, in order that they should cease to enjoy conditions superior to those of the less favoured villages? No, gentlemen, surely not. Our efforts should take a different direction; they should, by developing the industries and natural resources of those villages and hamlets, enable them too to get electric plants and obtain the advantages which the others already possess."

With one aspect of the labour problem he also dealt in the same speech in a manner which offended some and surprised many:

"On the day when the nation recovers its financial credit," he said, "when capital, confiding in our resolve to comport ourselves seriously, returns to our country, then, in verity, the problem of the working classes will have been solved."

By those and similar speeches, brief, plain and adapted to

\* At Mazatlán in November, 1919.

## President Obregón—a World Reformer

his hearers, which reflected his own ideas on subjects that were exercising the unready minds of labour leaders and inspiring the tirades of demagogues, Obregón first made his mark as a politico-social reformer. People felt that his temper of mind and soundness of judgment entitled him to the first place among those who aspired to shape the destinies of the Mexican people. Indeed, zeal for justice, for high social interests, and above all for morality in the public administration, won for him a place that was unique in the country.

Citizens and peasants flocked to his standard. Almost the entire State of Sinaloa adhered to his cause. In Guadalajara, where he received an impressive ovation, he epitomized the political history of his country in the following terse language :

“For over one hundred years the conduct of public affairs in our land has been in the hands of a group of ambitious men, who lowered it to the level of a lucrative profession, of men who sold their intellects to the highest bidder, and who contrived so to pervert the conception of politics that they defined it as the highest aptitude to hoodwink the greatest number of their fellow citizens.”\*

From among the stream of partisans who acclaimed Obregón as Mexico's man of destiny the Catholics as a body held aloof. They had been so deeply and so wantonly wounded by the soldiers of the revolutionary army that they would neither forgive its commander for the past, as they represented it, nor give him credit for his promises respecting the future. One of the leaflets spread by hand,† and posted on the walls of one of the towns, reads as follows :

“Catholics ! To-day the persecutor of our beliefs arrives here. Conduct yourselves as behoves outraged dignity. Even the dog has never been known to lick the hand that whipped him.”

But many individual Catholics, including illustrious prelates, who resented the treatment received by their Church as deeply as did their hierarchy, put faith in Obregón's assurances, which were precise and sincere, as, for example, when he said in Guadalajara :

“Since I issued my Manifesto last June I stated plainly

\* *El Informador*, the principal newspaper of Guadalajara, which was steadily opposed to General Obregón.

† In Puruándiro.

## Carranza sets a Death Trap

and sympathetically that in applying the law no account shall be taken of the political or religious creed which citizens may profess."

In spite of his splendid physique, Obregón suffered two attacks of illness during his electoral tour, one of which endangered for a brief while the success of his personal propaganda.\* The privations which he had undergone in his last military campaign affected his vocal chords to such an extent that his medical adviser forbade him to speak in public. But, as usual, luck was on his side, and in a few days† he shook off a malady of a couple of years' standing and was able to address audiences of several thousands.

Working men's associations, political clubs and influential individuals questioned the candidate respecting his stand on the matters that interested them most closely. And invariably he returned straight answers without the faintest attempt to evade or turn the issue, or even to gild the bitter pill which he was generally asking them to swallow. Militarism, for instance, was in everybody's mind, and a number of voters were desirous of seeing the army maintained at its actual strength. But Obregón, true to his anti-militarist creed, wrote that the army must, in the interests of the people, be cut down to fifty thousand men, and that no delinquents should ever again be sent by way of punishment to its ranks.‡

While Obregón was thus canvassing the country, González was putting forth strenuous efforts, but making very slight progress, and Carranza was discreetly preparing the ground for his master-stroke that was to perpetuate his regime and disguise his hand. For the first time he made a personal move by summoning the Constitutional Governors of all the States of the Union to meet in the capital.§ The object of the gathering was kept secret, as were also the proceedings of the Junta, as it was termed, but it soon became known that electoral manoeuvres in favour of the official candidate formed the

\* At the end of December, 1919.

† On January 5th, 1920. He also fell ill of influenza in February and remained some time under the care of his physician in Saltillo (Coahuila), recovering on February 28th, 1920.

‡ On December 3rd, 1920.

§ They met on February 6th, 1920. The Governor of Sonora, Adolfo de la Huerta, was one of the few who did not attend.

## President Obregón—a World Reformer

chief subject of discussion.\* One Press organ described the object of the assembly as “the maintenance of order by brute force and the pacific transmission of power by election and fraud.”†

After the conclusion of the Governor's convocation the real tug of war began. Carranza went to work openly, dismissing suspected military officers and civil servants by the hundred, and imposing upon States and cities governors and municipalities who were willing to co-operate with him in getting his candidate, Bonillas, elected. The officers commanding troops in the various States received instructions to work for the official candidate and against his opponents. Zealous officials were recompensed. Obregón's trains were tampered with and shunted off to side-tracks, so that he should be unable to keep his engagements.‡ His partisans were scattered by the police, arrested and generally subjected to high-handed treatment in the States of Yucatán, Campeche, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz and Jalisco. Semi-official journals were founded. High officials frankly admitted that Bonillas would be imposed on the country, and ingenuously defended the plan as conducive to the best interests of the nation.

One example of the way in which Carranza had the work done may suffice. The scene was the charming city of Guadalajara. An acquaintance and a friend of mine were living there, both of them schoolfellows and staunch friends of Obregón. Both of them, together with a number—some fifty or sixty—of other individuals, were suddenly arrested and imprisoned. According to law they were entitled to apply for an injunction to be released on bail or absolutely, but the law was ignored. One of the most incisive writers among them, a journalist by profession, was taken from the jail to Zacatecas and there shot. For those orders General Dieguez was responsible. But responsibility meant nothing. Besides, it was impossible to bring home any charge against the authorities, because no entry had been made in any of the prison books, admitting the prisoners or releasing them, and no record of the executed Press man was extant.

\* Cf. *El Monitor Republicano*, February 27th, 1920.

† *El Monitor Republicano*, February 11th, 1920.

‡ Cf. *México Nuevo*, November 24th, 1919; *El Monitor Republicano*, March 17th, 1920.

## Carranza sets a Death Trap

Carranza's confidence in the success of his plan and the stability of his regime was based principally on the well-grounded assumption that the people of Mexico were heartily tired of revolutionary movements, and would refuse to support another, nay, that they would turn against the promoters of a new outbreak, and that only a revolution could thwart his scheme. That assumption was in harmony with fact, but the conclusion which he drew from it was far-reaching and false. Obregón was also convinced that the population of the country wistfully yearned for peace and normal existence, and would fiercely oppose any attempt to inaugurate another period of bloodshed in the form of civil war. But the practical lesson which he extracted from this state of public feeling was radically different from that which Carranza inferred. And when his friends and partisans urged him to take up arms against the Dictator—as they had repeatedly done since his retirement from office—he answered them in these words :

“The man who provokes a quarrel and disturbs the public peace is sure to be anathematized by the nation. I, therefore, cannot be that man, nor must any of my political friends play this odious part. It behoves us to leave that rôle to our adversaries.”

And Carranza, who, in flagrant violation of the Constitution, undertook to impose his own candidate on the nation, was persuaded that the nation would look on, if not with positive approval, at least with resignation and without active resistance. Accordingly he moved every lever, transgressed many laws and recoiled from no measure, however oppressive, that seemed calculated to further his scheme. Dissatisfaction and bitterness were widespread throughout the land.

Bonillas, now the very corner-stone of Mexican politics, was practically unknown in the Republic. He was a man of honour and an excellent Ambassador, but nobody could say how he stood towards the drift of the momentous events of the day. His past, spent abroad, was bound up with the United States. In the current history of Mexico he had played no part, and the idea that he would be chosen President by the free votes of the people was so preposterous as to be felt by the public as an insult. It was realized that he was to be imposed on the country by Carranza, who needed a stalking-horse in the National Palace, and it was rumoured that



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Carranza would become his Minister of the Interior or of War.\* However this may be, it was the Government that supplied a large part of the funds requisite for his electoral campaign and prepared the scene for his reception in the capital, where he arrived from Washington on the eve of the first spring day.†

It was an extraordinary spectacle. Some fifty thousand people left their work and forgathered in the stately capital in order to hear and cheer a man about whom they knew absolutely nothing. There were some, however, who sought to provoke a quarrel. Mustard was thrown in the faces of Bonillas' supporters and also in the eyes of eight Obregónists, including the editor-in-chief of the Press organ that spontaneously supported him.‡ Shortly afterwards three Obregónist generals were apprehended. Obregón sent a vigorous protest to the President, who replied rebuking the General for his lack of respect towards the person of the Chief Magistrate,§ and announcing that two of the generals must serve a fortnight in prison, but that the third would be released. Excitement among those elements which were wont to make revolutions and governments in Mexico was rapidly growing. People felt that they were on the eve of fateful events. Pretexts and disguises were quickly being discarded for brutal realities.

In Tampico three members of Obregón's suite were seized and thrown into prison.|| Their chief endeavoured to visit them, but was refused permission. He then telegraphed to the competent authority for redress, but in vain.¶ No effort was any longer made to observe even the letter of the law; force was rampant, injustice open and cynical. Twice schemes were devised to assassinate Obregón himself in Tampico,\*\* but, as usual, fortune favoured him, and unforeseen occurrences hindered the would-be murderers from accomplishing their work.

\* *El Monitor Republicano*, March 4th, 1920.

† March 20th, 1920.

‡ *El Monitor Republicano*. Cf. *El Heraldo de México*, March 22nd, 1920.

§ *El Monitor Republicano*, March 26th, 1920.

|| By Colonel Carlos Orozco.

¶ *Monitor Republicano*, March 26th, 1920.

\*\* *El Monitor Republicano*, April 2nd, 1920.

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On the other hand, Carranza's position was fast becoming difficult, little though he understood its gravity. He had greatly under-estimated the obstacles in his way. It was gradually becoming obvious that many people, some of them highly thought of by the public, must be suppressed, and various acts of violence committed before he could hope to carry out his electoral scheme.

But of all the hindrances he encountered, the person of Obregón was the most formidable. For by this time the General had become a clarion to those elements of the population who are commonly spoken of as the nation, and so long as he was allowed to move about the country and address meetings, or even to live as a rallying point, the situation would grow increasingly disquieting. That much was now realized by the President, who thereupon wove a simple plan for Obregón's undoing. It was well thought out. The rôles were properly distributed. Nor was there, so far as one could see, a solitary chance in a hundred that Obregón would escape the fate that was being carefully prepared for him.

He, on his side, was vaguely aware that a trap was being laid, into which he was expected to fall. Friends warned him that an indictment was being secretly filed against him, which would surely end his candidature and probably his existence. But he never for a moment lost his buoyancy, which was reflected in this prophetic sentence uttered by a Press organ favourable to his cause :

"Carranza has chosen his hour and his fate."\* This firm confidence disconcerted his friends, who set it down to presumption.

The plot against Obregón turned upon the charge that he had had illicit dealings with rebels. They were said to have secretly pledged themselves to support him in case of a rising against Carranza. In accordance, it was alleged, with this scheme one of these rebel chiefs, who was in the camp of Felix Diaz—Colonel Roberto Cejudo—had publicly announced his intention to surrender to the Government, together with his men, and to repair to the capital in order to come to terms with Carranza, his secret intent being to turn traitor on the signal being given for the revolt. That was the allegation. But as many rebels surrender and receive a free pardon, there

\* *El Monitor Republicano*, March 23rd, 1920.

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was nothing singular in Cejudo's voluntary return to a peaceful existence. Nor was it the result of secret machinations. He was perfectly sincere, so far as one can judge. But it occurred to the advisers of the Government, later on, to view the capitulation as a mere ruse concerted by the rebel chief, Felix Diaz, through Cejudo's intermediary with General Obregón, and in order to demonstrate the connection between the two a letter was forged purporting to be Obregón's answer to Cejudo's proposals.

The accusation was preposterous, but the effect aimed at seemed none the less certain of attainment. The notion that Obregón would plot with rebels and put his adherence in writing was scouted as inconceivable by everyone who knew him, and the signature was so manifestly forged that even persons who were not experts in handwriting recognized it at once for what it was. But any stick was good enough to beat the only man capable of thwarting Carranza's plans.

The sudden arrest of Colonel Cejudo\* was the overture to the tragedy that was now about to be enacted. This officer was thrown into prison, and kept in solitary confinement, so that even his legal advisers were not permitted to visit him. For several days no charge was preferred against him, and the matter was shrouded in mystery. Rumours were current that other grave events were impending, that the civil administration of Sonora, for example, would be suspended and a military Government substituted—a step which involved a flagrant violation of the Constitution.† Now Sonora was the State to which Carranza had fled a few years before, and, arriving there defeated and desperate, with only two hundred and seventy men, had been saved by Obregón and his friend Adolfo de la Huerta.

The air grew thick with sensational reports and the nervous strain of the population waxed intense. General Alvarado sent a telegram to one of the newspapers‡ announcing the arrest of Obregón. Another Press organ gave out that the State of Sonora was up in rebellion.§ These and other

\* On March 28th, 1920.

† *El Monitor Republicano*, April 1st, 1920.

‡ *Orientación*, April 30th, 1920.

§ *El Universal*, April 3rd, 1920.

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announcements, equally premature but admittedly probable, intensified the general uneasiness and darkened the already sombre anticipations. People prepared themselves for grim surprises, especially for what General Obregón, in his Manifesto, had termed "mysterious death." All lesser interests began to recede into the background before the terrific spectre of another civil war.

As during a prairie fire or on a drifting ice-floe animals which are natural enemies forget their inborn tendency to fly at each other's throats and are cowed by the common danger into something approaching fellowship, so some members of the two rival parties, which hitherto had been assailing each other with might and main, felt that their proper course would be to join forces against the common enemy within the limits of their legal rights.

This feeling was strengthened by the report that Generals González and Obregón had met together in the outskirts of the capital,\* presumably with a view to stand side by side in legitimate defence of their respective rights, which were also the rights of the population, and to protest against the imposition of a man whom the people neither wanted nor knew.† This meeting, however, had no apparent effect upon the relations between General González and President Carranza, if one may judge by the circumstance that these two were closeted together for two hours some ten days later.‡

For several years Obregón had been permitted by the man whom he had raised to the presidency to observe the law with impunity and to exercise his rights within its limits. But now this period of tolerance had expired.

In the last days of March Obregón received the first tidings of the nature of the machinations which were intended to put him out of the way. Everybody acquainted with Mexican politics was alive to the fact that so long as he lived he would be a chronic and redoubtable obstacle to Carranza's dictatorial regime and its projected sequel, so that he must be given short shrift if the President was to get a free hand. And that this was the finishing stroke contemplated by his enemies he himself entertained no doubt. But neither had he any hesitation as

\* The place of meeting was Chapultepec; the date April 11th.

† *Orientación*, March 30th, 1920.

‡ Cf. *El Liberal*, April 23rd, 1920.

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to the way in which the danger should be met, for on all such critical occasions Obregón trusts to his own resourcefulness and his star. In this case he decided, as usual, to behave in a manner diametrically opposite to that which the Government anticipated. And it anticipated that he would flee to the United States. But this idea never entered his head. He had recourse once more to his favourite method, which he had so successfully employed in war, and it again stood him in good stead.

Obregón opened his mind on the whole subject in one of his best public utterances to an immense throng of listeners at Monterrey. He spoke with an eye to the fate that was being prepared for him. He disclosed some of the more significant acts of Carranza which characterized the critical nature of the situation. He said that at the moment when people were expecting that justice would be done in Tampico, where revolting crimes had been perpetrated in the presence of thirty thousand Mexicans and many foreigners, a message was flashed across the wires by the President, exhorting all military chiefs throughout the Republic to follow the example set them by the law breakers.

Two days later a telegram was handed to Obregón\* from a friend, apprising him that Cejudo's surrender was being construed by the authorities as a ruse, and that the War Office had ordered an indictment to be filed against Obregón, who was also to be charged with treason. The General's reply, ignoring the personal aspect of the matter, was characteristic: "Have taken cognizance of your telegram respecting Cejudo. The procedure you announce entails no danger whatever for our cause, for am convinced our triumph is certain and new aggressions will serve only to render it more solid and secure."

Shortly after this warning came the official summons,† ordering Obregón to appear at once as a witness in the legal proceedings "against the rebel" Cejudo. All the fine balancing and outward politeness were now thrown to the winds, and the struggle for life between Mexico's two most prominent sons was begun.

"I will repair to Mexico City," Obregón told the audience

\* On March 23rd, 1920, in Ciudad Victoria. The sender of the telegram was F. J. Novelo.

† On April 2nd, 1920.

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at Monterrey. "Possibly they will produce many witnesses there, perhaps too they will dispose of numerous judges. But the supreme tribunal which will deliver judgment in this trial is the nation. I go protected by the armour of my conscience, with the serenity of him who has known how to discharge his duty, and I go deliberately to face all the obstacles which may be thrown in our way." He further alluded to the fate of Madero, and admitted that it might well be the same that was now awaiting himself. Many of his friends advised, others besought, him not to venture into the capital, where he would surely find a prison and probably a grave.

On his arrival in Mexico City he was encircled by a host of Government spies, who were instructed to "shadow" him day and night, and on no account to let him out of their sight. Realizing his position and its potentialities, and minded to take all possible precautions, he accepted the offer of a friend to lodge in his house instead of putting up at an hotel.

## CHAPTER XV

### OBREGÓN IN THE TOILS

THE scheme for Obregón's ruin was necessarily complex and tortuous, seeing that it had to be disguised under some forms of law, however inapplicable. Hence at first he was summoned only as a witness in Cejudo's trial. The charge of treason would develop out of that. The summons was issued and sent, not by a civil tribunal or judge, but by the War Minister. This was an ominous beginning, for the War Minister had no jurisdiction over Obregón, who was no longer an officer of the army. Hence he was not legally bound to comply. But waiving his right to disregard the order, he walked deliberately into the lion's den, just as he had entered Villa's house in Chihuahua without fear or hesitation.

Before setting out on his journey he telegraphed to his friends asking them to refrain from demonstrations in his favour, and to renounce their intention to welcome him at the railway station. And they respected his wishes. Before he was an hour in the capital he knew what he had suspected all along, that he had been sent for, not as a witness, but as a prisoner condemned to die.

The friend's house in which he lodged was surrounded by police agents in various disguises, who, whenever he crossed the threshold, were continually at his heels. He had only a few friends to commune with, therefore, but these were ready to sacrifice their lives for his and could be trusted absolutely. His correspondence was slight, for Obregón was never given to letter writing, but such missives as he confided to the post or the telegraph were intercepted. Madame Obregón, in her home, over a thousand miles distant from her husband, was alarmed by the rumours that were current about his fate, and she made several efforts to get into touch with him, but in vain.

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At last she telegraphed direct to President Carranza, asking him where General Obregón was. The reply she received was vague and gave her no inkling as to how to communicate with him.

On the day fixed for the judicial examination Obregón appeared in the court, whence the public was excluded. He was questioned as a witness by the examining judge, who strove hard to hide his emotion, but by his extreme nervousness and a sudden fit of trembling bewrayed a latent conscience and a broken will. He might have been taken for a criminal confronted with his judge. So distraught was his attention and so reflex and mechanical were his movements that he placed the burning end of the cigar he was smoking between his lips, and then sprang out of his seat with the pain. Obregón, self-possessed and natural, speaking with ease, point and a slight touch of scorn, returned explicit answers to the insidious interrogations. The gist of what he deposed was that he knew nothing about Cejudo's surrender, had written no letter to him and was therefore useless as a witness. After that he was told to return on a certain day for a further hearing, whereupon he withdrew.

The drama was now fast approaching its climax. The next sitting was to be the fateful one. The illustrious witness was to be met there with the explicit charge of treason and dealt with condignly, but whether he was to die in accordance with a quasi-judicial sentence, or, as had happened to so many others, to be shot when supposed to be attempting to escape, was left for himself and his friends to divine. The air was again heavy with rumours, the newspapers were filled with hearsay and reports which the public believed to be true, or at most somewhat premature. Nobody doubted that Obregón had come to the end of his life-pilgrimage.

His own thoughts, temper and tact at this critical moment may be inferred from the following letter which he penned to his wife, who was undergoing agonies of suspense in remote Sonora :

“MY DEAR MARY,

“The happy days that you and I spent in Coahuila have left rooted in my heart one of those memories which diffuse sweetness over an entire lifetime. My enemies have sunk



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to the level of impotence and are betaking themselves to calumny and intrigue, but the truth will force its way upward and then they will be condemned by the verdict of public opinion.

"If Fate should have imprisonment and vexations in store for me, offer up your grief as a sacrifice to our Fatherland. Under no circumstances shall you sue any of my executioners for mercy, for they would but deride your sufferings, seeing that they have long since hardened their consciences against every noble sentiment.

"Receive, together with our dear little ones, the heart of him who does not forget you.

"ALVARO."

That letter was not delivered to Madame Obregón until the circumstances that inspired it had vanished. But the lady had no need of the exhortation it contained. Her attitude towards her husband's enemies was his own.

If Obregón trusted as usual to his luck, he was not fatalist enough to leave it without such seconding as he could afford to give it. He therefore arranged a plan of escape from the capital, which was audacious, perilous and original. It necessitated a disguise which was extremely difficult, owing to his having lost his right arm from the elbow, and yet he could neither quit the house in strange garb nor change his clothes in the streets.

In the afternoon he sallied forth for a motor drive, preceded and followed by the usual horde of detectives in motors and side-cars, and accompanied by a few devoted friends. At first the vehicle moved gently along the highway until it came to a square bordered with high sycamores on which several streets abutted. Then it rolled swiftly along for a considerable time until the shadows of the trees were lengthening and twilight was fast setting in. Having suddenly and for a few seconds whirled out of sight of the spies, Obregón suddenly doffed his sombrero, snatched his companion's hat, jumped out of the open carriage and disappeared down one of the streets. The detectives at once noticed the absence of one of the occupants of the motor, but believing it was Obregón's companion who had left, took no further heed of the matter. When they discovered their mistake they were at their wit's end.

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The authorities, too, grew uneasy. At all hours of the night messengers arrived at Obregón's lodgings and inquired of his host what had become of him. The answer at first was that he had accepted an invitation to dinner and would soon be back, but it subsequently changed to a simple declaration of ignorance. Next day all Mexico was seething with excitement. Something fateful had happened. Some said Obregón had been assassinated. Others affirmed that he was imprisoned. A third set believed that he had contrived to flee, but was being hotly pursued. Numerous efforts were put forth by Government officials to extract information from the host, who affected surprise, but maintained that his absent friend would surely be in his place to confront the examining judge at the hour fixed. To the questions put by the police to various passers-by as to whether anyone answering to the description of Obregón had been seen, contradictory replies were returned. One man had met him walking rapidly on such a road. Another had noticed him riding wildly in the opposite direction.

In the meanwhile Obregón had managed to reach the house of a friend unobserved, where he disguised himself as a working man, throwing his coat over his right shoulder to conceal the absence of his right arm. In this guise and with a battered hat pressed down over his eyes he walked to the railway station side by side with an engine driver, a loyal adherent of his cause. At the station the watchman at first refused to open the gates, but the engine driver insisted, and holding his lighted lamp to the watchman's eyes hindered him from subjecting Obregón's person to too close a scrutiny. Having been allowed to pass Obregón made for a train that was due to start some hours later, took his place in the express van, squatting behind large cans of milk and cases of merchandise. There he had to remain watching and motionless all night, listening to the conversation of the van-men, who several times came near detecting him.

Finally, after some thrilling adventures, he entered the State of Guerrero, where the President of the legislature, Dr. Sanchez, and the members of that body gave him a cordial welcome and the fulcrum he needed to dislodge the camarilla who were ruining the Republic. From Guerrero Obregón issued a Manifesto to the nation and organized and headed a movement for the "emancipation of the country from its

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emancipators.” His prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Carranza had indeed chosen his hour and his fate.

And incredible as it might seem, Carranza retained his usual impassivity and displayed unwavering confidence in the ultimate success of his arms. His trust in the army was absolute. A few days before the end he took a friend of mine to the balcony of the National Palace, and pointing to some soldiers on guard at the gates, exclaimed :

“Do you see those men ? They are the main supports of the Government. Against them neither Obregón nor any other rebel will prevail. Besides, the country is sated with political convulsions and sick of bloodshed. It is no longer in the mood to countenance a fresh outbreak. Local revolts are still possible, but a revolution is out of the question.”

Obregón himself, moved by anxiety for peace and by solicitude for his former chief, had a few weeks before\* sought out Carranza and spoken to him with that genuine frankness which respects friendship at the risk of offending the friend. He said :

“This is no time for conventional or misleading phrases. I have come to tell you plainly that you are living in a world of delusions. You place trust in your surroundings. You fancy they are devoted to you. In this you are mistaken. Let me give you proof. I will, if you like, return here in twenty-four hours’ time and present you with a complete list of all the telegrams, ciphered and *en clair*, which you will have sent and received between this and then. And mind you, this I shall do without any effort of my own.

“Your own people are betraying you, and you are leaning on a broken reed. I give you no names, but only facts.

“Yesterday, for example, you received a telegram from the town of Celaya apprising you of the arrival of five Obregónists at the station there and their names were appended. That telegram was sent to the station, where it changed hands in order that the senders might not be identified. Yet I have their names. And this goes on daily.”

Carranza was visibly disconcerted at this revelation of treachery, but quickly recovering his serenity, remarked : “Well, one thing I do know. The army is faithful to me ! I can and do trust it.”

I was in Mexico at the time, noting the changing attitude

\* In March, 1920.

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of those trimmers who are ever ready to turn from the setting towards the rising sun. Colonel Cantu, the Governor of Lower California, was one of these, and from his isolated coign of vantage he followed the events of the revolution with anxious interest and a rapidly responsive mental evolution.

In the meanwhile the tide of events was rolling from the capital to the extreme North, where Obregón was an heroic figure and counted numerous adherents, mostly men of ideals and convictions. Carranza's presidential candidate, Bonillas, had no chance there, and even if he were elected, it was almost certain that he would not be recognized. In order to suppress opposition betimes, Carranza delegated General Dieguez to Sonora with instructions to win over the Governor and other authorities by suasion if possible, but in every event to dislodge the obstacles to the success of his electioneering plan. Dieguez went about his task very clumsily. In no case could he have succeeded by dint of cajolery. As soon as he discovered this he passed suddenly from coaxing to threatening. Federal troops, he explained, must enter Sonora, such being the will of the President. Now that would have been a gross violation of the Constitution, and was construed by the State authorities as such. The Sonora Legislature passed a resolution severing its connection temporarily with the Republic, and three prominent public men issued a programme known as the Plan of Agua Prieta and headed the revolutionary movement. Carranza, however, was still serene, confident and impassive.

One day a friend of mine, Jesus Abitia, who took no active part in politics, arrived in Mexico City from Sonora, for the purpose of volunteering an eye-witness's account of how things were moving in the North. Abitia, as has been already mentioned, had been a schoolfellow of Obregón and entertained friendly relations with all the prominent men in Sonora, Sinaloa and Coahuila, including Carranza. Passing through the city of Guadalajara he learned that his brother was kept imprisoned as an Obregónist by General Dieguez, and he had grounds for believing that the same fate was in store for himself. He accordingly tempered his zeal with prudence.

In Mexico City Abitia obtained an audience with Carranza through a member of the General Staff, whereupon an hour's interesting conversation ensued. Abitia, careful not to wound the susceptibilities of the President, said :

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"I have come to give you an idea of the temper of the country, because it is unlikely that you will learn the truth about it from your environment. I have been in Sonora, Sinaloa, Coahuila, Chihuahua and various other States, have talked with numerous representative people there, and as I have learned their ideas, sentiments and aims I should like to make you too acquainted with them. I do not offer advice. I merely present you with materials for forming your own opinion. The country is in a fever of excitement. In the North public opinion is ranged against the Government."

"Why?" asked Carranza.

"Because of the behaviour of General Dieguez. When he went to Sonora he tried to induce de la Huerta and General Calles to support Bonillas at the elections. And finding that his efforts were lost labour, he told them that he would return to you, then go back to Sonora at the head of ten thousand troops, trample out the rebellion and give short shrift to the rebels."

"Impossible!" cried Carranza. "I refuse to believe that Dieguez ever employed such a threat."

"Well, sir, I believe it because I have proofs. I met General Angel Flores in Guadalajara eight days later, and he informed me that Dieguez himself admitted to him that he had made that threat. Now, after such a menace what course was open to de la Huerta and Calles?"

"To rebel," answered Carranza.

"Well, that is exactly what they did."

"There is yet another matter on which I should like to open my mind to you. You are building on the strength of the fidelity of the army. I believe you are out in your reckoning. The army is no longer disciplined. Some sections of it have, as you know, rebelled. But the bulk of it, while unwilling to rebel, is resolved not to fight against the troops that have revolted. In other words, they are on strike."

"That's precisely the word. It is a military strike, and I am aware of it. It is not a revolution."

"I should like, sir, to add that, wherever I went, I found that people regard the Cejudo Trial as a plot hatched in the National Palace."

Carranza flared up and retorted angrily: "It is nothing of the sort. I have in my hands the documents that com-

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promise Obregón. They prove that he is a rebel and had treasonable relations with rebels."

"Well, sir, I know nothing about the matter myself. I am only laying before you the beliefs of very many people in many States of the Republic. And I am acting solely from a sense of duty. There is one remark more which I venture to make. People assert and are convinced that the candidature of Bonillas is being imposed on the nation and they resent it."

Once more Carranza blazed up and exclaimed :

"That is false, false ! Bonillas is popular and that is why he will be elected. Of that there is no doubt. Even if Obregón had not rebelled, but had gone to the polls peaceably, he would have been defeated. For Bonillas is extremely popular."

"The only thing that interests me, sir, is to see the country rescued from its present situation. It is not yet too late to stay the revolution. It is not for me to suggest the means. You know them much better than I do."

Carranza observed : "I am seeking for them, but have not found them yet."

"We are all Mexicans," said Abitia, "and should make sacrifices for the good of the country. I have made one in coming here. And I hope I have said nothing to offend you."

Abitia felt that on leaving the room he might be ushered into prison. For this reason he did not dare to make the proposal that was on the tip of his lips, that Carranza should at once dismiss all the advisers around him and remain alone in the Palace until the arrival of the revolutionary troops. Then he would have laid down his powers and withdrawn from the country. But Carranza's thoughts were still running on the elections !

Abitia's apprehensions for his own liberty were dispelled when, as he rose to go, the President asked :

"How are you off for money ? "

"I have just completed a series of films and have been paid for them, so I have no grounds for complaint."

"Are you married yet ? "

"No, sir, not yet."

"Well, you may ease your mind respecting the state of the country. Remember, everything in this world has an end. And this crisis will also end. Soon. Very soon. Good-bye."

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A much more intimate friend and faithful adherent had already tendered sound advice to the President, who had ears only for the cheering reports of the circle of drones and flatterers in whose midst he lived, cut off from the world of realities. Adolfo de la Huerta, Governor of Sonora, had laboured hard and successfully for his cause, had served as a member of his Cabinet, undertaken delicate missions at critical moments and finally risen to the highest post in the State of Sonora.\*

De la Huerta was now a commanding figure there. Beloved by the citizens for his simplicity, integrity and glowing sympathy with the masses, who were usually thought of merely as an agglomerate without feelings or a soul, he had been first unanimously elected to represent them as Senator and then chosen to administer their affairs as Governor. Years before he had gone to the capital to reason with Madero about the oblivion into which revolutionary ideals had fallen, and when that President was menaced shortly afterwards by a revolution, de la Huerta, armed only with a revolver, met him, offered him his services and stood guard over the house he was in while bullets were falling as thick as rain drops in the street around him.

After the murder of Madero, de la Huerta joined hands with Carranza, and continued to stand by him loyally until this sinister electoral campaign revealed the depths to which his ancient chief had fallen.

De la Huerta is an enthusiastic pursuer of ideals, into whose ordinary actions a lofty humanity is ever infused. The root of his nature and the mainspring of his activities is an intense fellow-feeling for suffering humanity, quickened with a fervent desire to better their lot. The purity of his moral character is recognized by all who know him personally. And his principal defects are exaggerations of these admirable qualities. Impatient of compromise, he aims at the best and is unwilling to content himself with the lesser of two evils, because it is not a positive good. Again, he unconsciously

\* Born in Guaymas on May 26th, 1882, de la Huerta was first an official of the local branch of the National Bank, later on he joined Carranza, became Home Secretary in his Cabinet, and then successively Provisional Governor of Sonora, Consul-General of Mexico in New York, Senator for Sonora and Governor of that State. In the last-named capacity de la Huerta introduced a number of excellent laws in favour of the working classes.

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assumes that the high grade fibre of his own soul is that of all sorts and conditions of men, and he accordingly legislates at times for a race of superior beings who exist only in his generous imagination.

De la Huerta's idealism, which lifts him at times above the ground of realities into a higher region, is the basis of the charge levelled against him by his enemies that he is a theoretician and almost a visionary. His honesty, unselfishness and devotion to the cause of the inarticulate masses of the people have never been called in question. To Carranza he had always been an honest counsellor and a staunch friend.

At first he indignantly refused to credit the reports current about the President's intentions, and when he could no longer doubt, he argued, pleaded and entreated. These patient efforts, embodied in the correspondence between the two men, were not discontinued until it had become evident that the President was resolved to send federal troops into the State of Sonora and remove the Governor by force. That severed the bond of friendship and entailed civil war. Sonora seceded provisionally, whereupon General Calles organized the troops and made ready to defend the State.

The loss of Sonora to Carranza was irremediable from a military, economic and moral point of view. For the country is difficult of access to the federal troops, it contributes a large proportion of the federal revenue, and its military and political chiefs were men of known integrity and strong convictions whose example carried great weight in the Republic. But the President, as we saw, resided in a political hot-house, from which the violent gusts of realities from outside were effectually excluded.

The conflagration was now spreading fast. Suddenly it reached Mexico City, whereupon Carranza decided to transfer the political capital to Veracruz. On the eve of his departure he received a foreign Press man to whom he unburdened his heavy soul. Against Obregón, he said, he had no reproach to utter. That general had been frank and open in his opposition. But the treason of his intimates and confidants caused him excruciating pain.

"I cannot trust anyone," he exclaimed. "I do not know whom to trust. My closest friends, men whom I have made,



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have turned against me.”\* And to the lowest place in the inferno which he mentally created for these traitors he consigned General Pablo González.

The truth is he had no intimate friends. Self-love excludes intimate friendship.

Carranza's end was tragic and he met it with dignity.

He sallied forth from the capital, not like a champion preparing to fight for a cause, but like a wealthy patriarch of Biblical days, taking with him his relatives, his friends, their wives and concubines, their kine and sheep, and gold and silver and household chattels. A large number of trains, over eight miles in length, rolled slowly along the rails. In the most luxurious carriages went many scarlet women, spick and span dandies and the ornamental palace drones. Less comfortably appointed were the carriages of the generals, officers, Ministers and deputies. The remainder of the trains were Noah's arks, carrying soldiers, their women, children, pigs, turkeys, hens, chickens and cooking utensils. The gold of the Treasury, the archives of the General Staff and the dies of the Mint were also among the impedimenta.

Over ten thousand persons took part in this strange exodus, and of these less than one half were males. Their relations to each other were those of old friends or chance acquaintances. There was no order, no plan, no distribution of tasks, and although everybody knew that skirmishes and battles would have to be fought on the way, no one looked after the artillery, nor were there doctors, medicines or medical instruments on board. There was not even enough water for the engines.

Among the few who kept their heads and inspired the undisciplined soldiers by their courage, carriage and coolness were the President, the presidential candidate Bonillas and Carranza's *alter ego*, Luis Cabrera. And of these the last-named must have felt that nothing short of such a miracle as was wrought in favour of the Israelites fleeing from Egypt across the Red Sea could save them if they were once confronted with the rebel forces.

Obregón, to whom all the revolutionary commanders looked for guidance, was in close touch with the revolutionary troops in Cuernavaca.† He had a rounded plan of operations, was in

\* The *New York Times*, May 27th, 1920.

† About two hours by rail from the capital.

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communication with the chiefs of the movement throughout the Republic, and knew that if the orders issued were carried out the eight miles of trains would never enter the terminus at Veracruz. But he and his comrades were sincerely sorry for Carranza, and for the sake of the revolutionary cause, as well as of his former relations to his chief, Obregón was particularly anxious that no personal harm should befall him. Accordingly he dispatched the necessary instructions to the officer in command of the troops where the first encounter was anticipated.\* The urgent telegram embodying these orders was intercepted by Carranza's troops.† The following is the translation :

“ To LUIS T. MIRELES,  
“ Rinconada.

“ Urgent.

“ General Obregón in an urgent message, without number, dated at the headquarters at Cuernavaca,‡ orders as follows : ‘ I ratify all my previous orders. Endeavour to destroy the track and hinder passage of the train on which Carranza is travelling. Notify him that if he desires to go on to Veracruz every guarantee will be given to him, also an adequate escort, which will accompany him until he embarks on whatever steamer he may select. The remainder of his party are to be retained and disarmed, and Headquarters notified so that the requisite instructions may be transmitted.’

“ (Signed) ISMAEL RAMIRES,  
“ Chief of Staff.”

Other messages were also sent to the President exhorting him to avert bloodshed and guaranteeing him a safe passage to whatever foreign country he might select. But Don Venustiano, serene and impenetrable, would or could not realize his position and, as he had stated before starting, was resolved to fight it out.

At last the rebels threw themselves across the railway line and opened fire on Carranza's agglomeration of human beings.|| The fight was short and the result adverse. Carranza abandoned his car, mounted a horse and rode away with

\* At Rinconada.

‡ On May 10th, 1920.

† On May 12th.

|| On May 24th, 1920.

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a few intrepid followers, while the scarlet women and the other parasites rushed to the motors and disappeared in the night.

A certain Colonel Herrera, who had been a rebel, but surrendered two months before, now\* joined Carranza's party and offered to defend the President. His offer was accepted without more ado, and he was placed in charge of Carranza. That night he chose a hut in which the President and a few friends were to pass the night and himself withdrew from the village.† In the dead of the night the hut was attacked by Herrera's men; Carranza was heard to exclaim: "I cannot get up. My leg is broken." Immediately afterwards he was shot dead.

After the defeat of Carranza's followers, who were allowed to disperse quietly to their homes, the election of a provisional President had the effect of an apple of discord flung among all those whose aims, personal or political, were inspired by motives alien to the interests of their country. Of these General Pablo González was the most prominent, had by far the largest sums of money at his disposal and could reckon upon a numerous following in the South. Of him Carranza, on the eve of his flight from the capital, was reported to have said to a foreign Press representative:‡

"González is the most unfit man of all. Not only do I know his personal unfitness to handle Government money, but also his moral and civic weakness. Why, only three days ago, in this room, González came to me, saying that if I would give him command of the army and repay the money he had spent in the election campaign, he would be loyal and would take the field against Obregón. But by this time I knew that González was plotting against me, and I refused to allow him to return to the army."

The next of these aspirants was Señor Robles Dominguez, who had struck up a friendship with foreign officials, and had written a letter to the Military Attaché of the United States,||

\* On May 24th, 1920.

† Tlaxcalantongo.

‡ The correspondent of the *New York Times*. Cf. *New York Times*, May 27th, 1920.

|| Colonel Robert M. Campbell. The document is dated January 8th, 1920, and was recognized as authentic by the writer himself in a letter dated June 8th, 1921, and addressed to the journal *La Prensa* of San Antonio, where it was published.

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requesting his active assistance and promising him in return a quarter of a million dollars in case he was elected President.

Just before the votes were given for a provisional President, a certain foreign official entered the precincts of the building in which the election was being held, went up to General Obregón and spoke somewhat in the following terms: "I am, as you know, a friend of your country, and I desire its welfare. Among the preliminary conditions of this are internal peace and recognition by foreign Powers. It seems to me that both could best be furthered by the election of Robles Dominguez. In any case, if he were chosen for the post, I think I could promise speedy recognition by my Government."

"I am afraid you have brought your peace message to the wrong address. You know perfectly well who the electors are, and it is to them that it should be directed," was Obregón's reply.

Adolfo de la Huerta, who had so materially contributed to the downfall of the sinister regime, was chosen as the temporary Chief of the Republic, and the general elections for the presidency were ordered for the autumn. Thereupon Pablo González, who had been buoyed up with the certitude that the presidential chair would be his, issued a rhetorical manifesto to the nation and withdrew in dudgeon to Monterrey.

De la Huerta, true to himself, won the hearts of the people during his brief tenure of office. Accessible to everyone, he stood for hours every afternoon in the National Palace, receiving petitions from peasants, working men, destitute women and all who had, or thought they had, a grievance, and helping them by act or counsel. His legislative measures were beneficent. But one of the most arduous tasks which he tackled and achieved was the taming of the human beast, Villa, who, though defeated as a rebel, had never been captured as a bandit.

That man was so wrought upon by de la Huerta that within a couple of months he had laid down his arms, retired to a sequestered estate presented to him by the Federal Government and was devoting his days to husbandry on an extensive scale and his nights to introspection, repentance and prayer. Perhaps the greatest tribute that could be paid to the good

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faith of de la Huerta and of his representative, General Martinez, was Villa's unwavering trust. The bloodthirsty bandit, who has the deaths of over forty thousand Mexicans to his account and boasted of it, has, it is alleged, since become a model of sobriety, industry and domestic virtues.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A TOUR OF EXPLORATION

PRESIDENTIAL elections in Mexico were a novelty. The transmission of supreme power there had usually been made by means of State strokes, rebellions or sham voting. As for the people, they were expected to be ready with their plaudits for whatever individual chanced to rise on the crest of a revolutionary wave and tell the nation that he was its spokesman and trustee. The masses took little or no interest therefore in this sanguinary game of politics, and had no sense of civic duty. The only candidates who had ever moved about the country addressing the people and canvassing their votes were Madero and Bonillas. And they had visited only a few States. Obregón resolved to become acquainted with most.

I had already accompanied him on his visit to various parts of the Republic in the Centre and the North, and I also went with him now on his travels southwards and eastwards.

This tour was described at the time as an electoral campaign. But that was a misnomer. Obregón had no need to go canvassing. Nobody doubted now that his election to the presidency of the Republic by an overwhelming majority was a foregone conclusion, most of the public bodies in the Union having made that clear by their resolutions. His only competitor left was Robles Dominguez, and although he had in his possession secret documents which compromised that candidate and General Pablo González as well, he refused, as we saw, to make them public. It is better to have Obregón for an adversary, as Carranza discovered when it was too late, than to have others as friends. Robles Dominguez, in spite of his being supported by a section of the Catholic party, was therefore not a serious rival.

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Obregón's intention was to make the best possible preparation for his future duties by acquainting himself with the conditions, wants and desires of the population. With a large part of the country he was already well acquainted. During his various campaigns in the civil war he had traversed many of the States, had been in close contact with the inhabitants, was conversant with the resources of the country and the requirements of the people. I was astonished at his intimate knowledge of the hills and vales, the rivers, glens and lakes of the various States through which he and I had passed in June and July—Jalisco, Colima, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Michoacán. Everywhere crowds of people flocked to see and shake hands with him—people who had helped him or been helped by him during the period of storm and stress. And he remembered them all. It is this marvellous memory that enables him to recognize everybody he once knew, and to recall to mind words and incidents which they are pleased to hear commemorated. In one of the towns of Oaxaca he and I were standing on the platform of the train when it was slowing down before a vast crowd of expectant people, and all at once he exclaimed: "There are two women over there in the thick of the throng whom I knew during one of my campaigns in the North. They did good work when accompanying their husbands—soldiers in my army then. I must go over and talk to them."

It was with a view to getting into touch with the people of as many of the States as possible that General Obregón undertook this tour. "I don't want to be dependent upon the eyes and ears of others, and still less do I wish to be beholden to reports and memorials for my knowledge," he remarked to me. "I must see and hear for myself. Now is the time."

And he made excellent use of his opportunities. Wherever we stopped he contrived to have an exhaustive talk with the most competent people in the place, and where, for lack of time, we could not remain, the chosen representatives of the towns and villages entered his car and had long interviews with him there. In one district they were eager for schools; in another they wanted federal help to canalize their water and enjoy a supply all the year round; in a third canton they were keen to have bridges built; a fourth district asked for a railway line.

The General listened attentively and asked questions,

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but seldom took notes. He had no preconceived ideas, but he sometimes knew the requirements of a county or a district better than its own spokesmen. Once, for example, the local authority of a certain place asked him to favour the establishment of an experimental school of agriculture in the town through which we were passing. "I am afraid I cannot do that," he replied. "This is not the right place for it. What you want here is effective help to develop the very special agricultural industries of the State, not to lose yourselves in theories about agriculture generally. Information and assistance that will help you to grow more or better sugar cane, coffee, etc., you need and shall have." After a short discussion the representatives of the district admitted that Obregón's idea would better suit their requirements than their own.

Another object of this electoral tour was to symbolize the emancipation of the various States from the arbitrary meddling of the federal authorities. Under Carranza the sovereignty of most of the States was reduced to a shadow. Governors, instead of being elected as the Constitution prescribes, were appointed by the Dictator. Moreover, in municipal and other elections irresistible pressure had been brought to bear upon the constituents. In the town of Tapachula\* I was told by the people I met there that every man who had independent opinions about politics had gone in fear of his liberty and his life. Obregón therefore had no rival in all Chiapas. And his presence in that State aroused manifestations of spontaneous enthusiasm which almost transcend belief. Moreover—and this is a significant fact—none of the former candidates for the presidency had ever set foot on the fertile territory of Chiapas. It had been ignored.

Obregón had a further object in view. He desired to arouse an interest in public affairs among the people by setting forth his own ideas on the subject.

Characteristic of the man and of the tendency which he represented was his method of travelling. The generals under Carranza were wont to set out in special trains with their friends, accompanied at times by their harems. They also carried bountiful supplies of provisions and behaved generally as satraps, to whose whims and vagaries the convenience of the public was subordinated. Obregón eschewed luxury and

\* In the State of Chiapas.



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cultivated simplicity. He flatly refused offers of special trains, which were several times made to him by railway companies. On our previous journey to Colimas and Manzanillo, for instance, we travelled, as indeed we did during a considerable part of this tour, in the very worst cars, filled with working men. And whenever a storm cloud burst, the rain came in, or else we had to close the window shutters—there was no glass—and abide in darkness. I did not object to the hard seats nor even to the overcrowded cars—for, sooth to say, in an overcrowded public vehicle, the Mexican public is more good-humoured and obliging than any crowd in Europe. But I confess I sorely missed cleanliness. I longed for it wistfully and bore its opposite impatiently.

Parenthetically it is right to remark that the Mexican people, and in particular the Indians, are among the cleanliest in the world, whenever they have water near at hand. In Yucatan, Chiapas, Tabasco and Campeche, even the working men often take two baths a day, and in the first-named State change their costumes as often. On the high tableland the absence of water entails the absence of cleanly habits.

Our meals on both occasions we took wherever and however we could get them. Once, at about four o'clock in the morning, on our way from Guadalajara to Colima, owing to a derailment on the road, we had to quit the train and wend our way over the fields to strike the track at another point, and there await a car and an engine. One of the consequences of this mishap was that we were without food until evening, and were then forced to eat what the Indian women hawked about at the stations. In one place I partook of food—dark, hard meat, which we broke as though it were a large biscuit. On the steamer from Manzanillo to Mazatlan the number of passengers was legion—a ragged, dishevelled throng. And they lay about in every nook and corner of the ship, sleeping, eating, cooking, etc. But the General never worried. Always bright and cheerful, he picked his way among them and looked as happy and contented as though he were on the *Mauretania* or the *Olympic*, and what was a greater puzzle to me, he managed to look clean and well groomed. From Mazatlan northwards we slept in a goods wagon, and were quite pleased when it was not over full. But however closely packed together, the good humour and courtesy of the company was contagious.

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I further enjoyed the advantage of studying Obregón under ever changing, and at times trying, conditions. He and I took our meals together and spent hours on the platform of the train, in the early morning or in the moonlight, exchanging ideas upon all manner of problems, social, political, historical and philosophical. At the various stations where the local authorities welcomed him with music, oratory and public ovations, I stood by his side, heard him deliver speeches and answer questions, so that I may truly say that I had an exceptionally favourable opportunity of forming a judgment of the man and becoming acquainted at close quarters with his strength and weaknesses. There are no conditions calculated to bring these out in stronger relief than a journey of a couple of months by railway, steamer and motor, diversified by intense heat, torrential rains, heavy storms and innumerable unforeseen intermezzos.

And I can state at once that I have never been more profoundly impressed by any personality whom I have met in the course of a long life.

This last journey was an uninterrupted series of ovations—spontaneous, noisy, tiring. In Mexico nothing like it had ever been experienced before. It was a sequence of royal receptions. The stations at which our train halted were thronged with multitudes, many of whom had travelled thirty or forty miles on foot from the country around. At other little stations at which the train was not to stop, it was met by delegations with banners and flags, and the exchange of greetings took place in the carriage. Addresses were presented, speeches delivered, banquets offered everywhere. In the city of Oaxaca the tramways had clusters of human beings on the roofs and hanging on to the platforms and steps like bees, until two cars broke down in the principal street. In Orizaba nearly all the inhabitants turned out and followed Obregón to the city of Cordoba, where the entire population was awaiting him, and then they stoned each other for the honour of being considered his warmest adherents.

Never in my life have I witnessed such tumults of wild enthusiasm. In Oaxaca two soldiers at the station, carried away by their feelings, discharged their loaded rifles beside my head and then apologized. In the capital of Yucatan I was almost crushed to death. I met a delegation of thirty odd

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peasants who had travelled two nights over the hills in order to shake hands with their future President.

Obregón had eyes and ears for other things besides the political aspect of the journey. The scenery, the fertility of the soil, its potentialities, the condition of agriculture, the problems of labour and capital were among the topics that gripped his attention and stimulated his ingenuity.

He had occasion to admire some of the most sublime land and sea-scapes that the fancy of a poet or a painter can conceive. One might say of Mexico that it is a poet's ante-natal dream, realized in a myriad artistic forms. It is endowed with every climate which the most various and exacting mortals could desire, and owing to the circumstance that altitude and not distance differentiates them, they are all within easy reach of the traveller. Thus we passed in a few hours from a sea of orange and lemon blossoms, from extensive coffee plantations and cocoanut groves, into a belt of dark pine forests, whence we could view the silent region of snow and the white smoke issuing from the volcano crater and losing itself in the abyss of the encircling blue. We stood in a valley walled in with mighty mountains of indescribable loveliness and gazed in wonder at the craggy masses of yellow or red stone, fashioned like an abode of Titans, with bastioned citadels, battlements, towers and graceful minarets. Deep in the entrails of these sky-cleaving hills lie mines of silver and gold, copper, emeralds, turquoises, topazes and long meandering veins of opal that dart piercing rays of wondrous light to the eyes of the miners. In Michoacán we rowed over placid glassy lakes which bask in continuous sunshine to islands unsurpassed for beauty, on which reside the descendants of an ancient tribe, the simplicity of whose lives would have sent a thrill of pleasure to the heart of J. J. Rousseau.

Only a poet could convey a picture of the wide-spreading twilight realms of the forests we passed—dense, mysterious and awe-inspiring, in which, deep under tangled roots and rank vegetation, lie the mouldering wrecks of unremembered civilizations sepulchred in monumental forms. We visited some of the disinterred cities—there are many more still buried—whose halls, portals, columns and fanes have laid for ages in unsunned forest depths. We examined the quaint script bearing messages still undeciphered to the tumultuous world of to-day from a

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race that cradled the American Continent some three thousand years ago, and whose dreams took shape in the stone and form and colour scattered around us.

We sometimes watched pensive Indians as they sat by those old temples or on the brow of a hill, gazing for hours over the valley below into space, lost, one might think, in a mist of sense and dream and communing with the shades of their forbears. . . .

Obregón was struck by the natural riches of Mexico, which, although proverbial, are realized by only a few people in the United States and by fewer still in Europe. Even he, who had traversed a great part of the North and Centre before, was amazed at what the South now revealed to him.

Mexico is the second largest exporter of petroleum in the world, and is become an object of keen interest to all the Great Powers in consequence. And yet her export of metals is of greater importance still, and brings in about twenty millions sterling a year more than her oil consignments.\* She produces more silver than any other land on the globe. But her soil is probably capable of yielding far more wealth than can be extracted from the subsoil. After Brazil, Mexico is the country that grows most coffee. The forests of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Tabasco contain finer timber than mahogany, besides precious woods which, being unknown to the botanist, have as yet no names. Fruits of all kinds abound, and if the means of transportation were frequent and cheap might be sold at a good profit in European markets. In the South we saw shanties and houses of peasants built of cedar wood ; in the North (Sinaloa and Sonora) factories regularly burn mahogany as fuel.

Obregón reflected on these and kindred phenomena during his "electoral" tour, and drafted plans for the amelioration and extension of waterways, railways, carriage roads and telegraphs. On one subject his opinion was called in question at the time by many who had formed their judgment from books, whereas he had only experience to guide him : He maintained that the mineral wealth of the country, enormous though it is, would be vastly surpassed by the agricultural, if sufficient capital and labour were expended on it. To this thesis objection was taken that a surprisingly large percentage of Mexican soil is good for nothing. Obregón replied that the irreclaimable

\* Cf. *El Universal*, February 18th, 1922.

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land was very much less than theoreticians say. And since then some competent scientists have come forward to prove he is right.

"Look at Chiapas," he exclaimed. "It could seriously compete with Brazil in the coffee mart of Hamburg. A large portion of Oaxaca is equally well situated. Much of the land that we saw in Sonora is better than that of California. All that is needed to make it more productive as well, are irrigation and modern methods of cultivation. And the first step can and will be taken by spreading the right kind of education and the example of foreign colonists."

Those words were uttered in the year 1920. Since then observers from Europe and the United States have been exploring the Republic with a view to discover the agricultural value of the land in the various States, and the reports recently published fully bear out Obregón's assertion.\*

Despite the riches of the land, its variety of climates and some fine human types, the bulk of the population is soaked in squalor and pinched with misery. Few countries could become so entirely self-contained, prosperous and progressive. And yet its population is not only not increasing as it should, but is dependent on foreign countries for some of the necessities of life.†

The tendency of the population, so marked in European and Asiatic lands, to increase and multiply to the limits of all available means of subsistence, has been completely neutralized in Mexico by the apathy, ignorance and ingrained listlessness of some sections of the people, by the perverseness of their rulers and by the greed of foreign adventurers. Instead of the two hundred millions who, it is computed, might sustain life comfortably within the boundaries of the Republic, if the social and economic arrangements were passably favourable, there

\* The expert Mr. H. von Schuckling, for example, declared that if the sums employed in the extraction of metals and oil had been invested in agriculture, Mexico would to-day be four times richer than it is. "Veracruz, Tabasco, Tepic and Tamaulipas," he added, "may take Cuba's place in producing sugar and tobacco." Cf. the newspapers of New York. See also *Excelsior*, August 29th, 1921.

† Maize is the staple food of the Mexicans and can be cultivated in every State of the Republic. Yet it has to be imported from abroad. The amount consumed daily is valued at half a million dollars, U.S. currency. President Obregón has since taken a series of practical measures to foster and spread the cultivation of this grain.

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are hardly sixteen millions to-day, and most of these are, as we saw, chronically underfed, wretchedly housed, a prey to disease and doomed to premature death.

The land in extensive districts is superlatively fertile, yielding four, and in some places as many as seven, crops a year, yet it can hardly be said to be cultivated. It is never properly ploughed nor manured. The natives are contented to keep body and soul together without straining themselves to earn the wherewithal to render life agreeable. In parts of Chiapas and Tabasco they live on the fish they catch, the birds they shoot and the bananas which they have but to shake from the trees. Of regular hard work they fight shy, dreaming away their lives as the drowsy hours creep by. These people illustrated the saying of the Irishman who remarked that "idleness covers a man with nakedness." It certainly had that effect there.

It was in some of the villages,\* composed of thinly scattered huts which had, so to say, no interiors, of the two Southern States just mentioned, that representatives of these dreamy lotus eaters came and expressed their wishes in words that had the true ring of sincerity :

"We are poor people here, but we are contented. All we ask is to be let alone. Give us peace and we will ask for nothing more. You are right welcome here because you bring us peace."

When some orators talked to these men and women of "effective suffrage," "democratic principles" and the like, a feeling of sadness came over me. All of them were poor, most of them were insufficiently nourished and were not lodged like modern men and women. And I asked myself what sort of pictures were conjured up before their minds by those strange phrases.

In the mining and oil districts, on the other hand, there are always labourers and artisans enough who are prized for their industry, patience and ingenuity. In the United States also tens of thousands of admirable Mexican working men are to be found tilling the ground, constructing roads and creating wealth in various ways. The difference between these types is doubtless partly due to temperamental sluggishness in the one and to higher vitality in the other. But only partly. Education and example would go far to lessen it.

\* The first time was in a village called Tres Valles.

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In those southern climes Obregón came in contact with types of various races whose ancestors arrived and settled here no one knows whence or when, and whose physical and mental characteristics are probably still as accentuated as when their forbears first landed in the country. Those traits take the observant visitor in thought now to the Egypt of pre-Pharaoh days and now to the China and Corea of yore. These resemblances, which are among our few clues through the mists of prehistoric days, became sharper in outline whenever we caught a glimpse of the intimacies of their lives, and the critical events thereof, such as birth, marriage and death. The principal softening influences which they have undergone are those of Nature and the mystic rites of the Catholic Church. Nature's ascendancy is everywhere manifest. The primeval forests have not been trodden by human feet in historic times. The houses are often mere straw walls, at best they are made of dried clay. Modern man leaves no enduring traces here. He is himself moulded by the everlasting forces of Nature. Everywhere one is impressed by her beauty, her alternate silence and convulsions, by the omnipresence of force and the nothingness of man.

What struck Obregón most forcibly in those people were their statuesque faces, unused to the social masks worn by the inhabitants of towns, their freedom from vulgar curiosity, their self-respect and serenity and their dignified indifference to the self-complacent airs of the visitors. Those children of nature, with their stoical endurance, their absence of fear, their pathetic resignation and their fatalistic outlook upon life, form one of the brighter threads in the dark tapestry of passion which represents the recent history of Mexico. It is impossible to contemplate them without releasing a stream of sympathy for the world of turmoil outside, with its unrest, fury and despair. These people of few wants and generous impulses combined with the trees, the shrubs, the winds and rivers around them to form a picture which can never be forgotten.

But the type is in process of physical degeneration almost everywhere in the South owing to insufficient food and unchecked disease. And Obregón was quick to notice the symptoms and to prescribe a remedy.

Long after this particular tour General Obregón visited

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the celebrated town of Uruapan,\* and he had many talks with the peasants, whose deep-rooted indolence, ingrained aversion to modern methods of husbandry and absence of initiative were calculated to drive an optimist to despair. The waste of fertile lands was deplorable.

"Why don't you sow anything over there?" asked General Obregón, pointing to an extensive fallow field.

"I don't know. We fish in the lake," answered the spokesman of the peasants.

"Potatoes and vegetables would grow very well round here, would they not?"

"They would, of course," was the reply.

"Where do you get them from?"

"From the town."

"What do you pay for potatoes?"

"We don't often buy them. They cost sixty centavos a kilo."†

The spread of agricultural improvements which the President is assiduously endeavouring to foment will do much to obtain from the land all that it can produce and to render labour incomparably more efficient. But it is a slow process, and its ultimate upshot depends almost entirely upon the docility and enterprise of the people. Example is far more efficacious than exhortation, and in order to stimulate the natives, colonies of foreigners accustomed to similar climates and experienced in agricultural labour are being brought into the country and encouraged to settle there. It is to expedients such as this that Brazil and the Argentine Republic owe their present high standard of economic life and their hopeful outlook on the future.

As an instance of the curious requests made to Obregón on the way, that of a disconsolate woman who sought him out in Campeche may be mentioned. She had heard that he was preaching justice to all and would soon be able to practise it.

"What can I do for you?" he asked the sobbing mother.

"I want justice, justice."

\* In the State of Michoacan. That district produces the finest coffee in the world, but in such a small quantity that it has never been exported. The berries have a form different from that of all other coffee in Mexico or elsewhere.

† Thirty cents U.S. currency, or about fifteen cents a pound. The potato, it should be remembered, is indigenous to Mexico.



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“ Tell me what has befallen you.”

“ My son, my beloved son has been murdered, and I want you to punish the assassin.”

“ The law will do that, but we first must get hold of the criminal. That is the first step, and it is for you to take it or to help us to take it. Tell me what happened.”

The woman then began her story, but Obregón cut it short by asking :

“ Can you give me any idea where the man is to be found and who committed the deed ? ”

“ Yes. He is in prison.”

“ In prison ! In that case justice will be done. He has not yet been tried, I suppose.”

“ Oh yes, he has.”

“ Well, and was he found guilty ? ”

“ To be sure he was.”

“ What was his sentence ? ”

“ Fifteen years' penal servitude.”

“ Well, my good woman, I don't understand what you want me to do. Justice has been done.”

But the unhappy mother withdrew, still groaning and querulous and clamouring for justice.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A TOUR OF EXPLORATION (*continued*)

WHEN he set out on this long and adventurous journey, Obregón, in reply to my remark that the masses cared little for political programmes and promises, said :

"Hitherto most 'emancipators' of the nation endeavoured to better its lot by dint of promises, constitutions, programmes and laws. What it needed, but did not receive, was genuine help. The people must be properly fed, decently housed and then educated. Hunger weakens the human element in the masses and strengthens the bestial. It is to revolution that hunger makes its ultimate appeal. I am not going to unfold a vast political programme, but only to promise them two main innovations; effective suffrage and the substitution of morality for politics. The fact is that the people, like the land, of Mexico has splendid potentialities to which it does not yet possess the key. It is our duty to supply it with that."

Obregón, who sometimes had to deliver as many as six speeches a day, always spoke briefly, clearly and to the point.

"You may lift the people up to the level of an idea," he once remarked, "but you should never lower an idea to make it acceptable to the people." And again: "The future of our country depends upon the whole-hearted collaboration of the entire nation in pursuit of the same common ends. And the people must be gradually keyed up to that. The difficulty is less the passivity of the masses than the activity of professional politicians. It is true that the national self-consciousness of the people is not yet sufficiently intense, but it would be a calamity to allow it to grow chauvinistic. Hence the necessity to establish an ethical standard of values."

From Obregón as a public speaker I had not expected much, for neither by temperament nor by training is he

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rhetorical. His ordinary conversation, although lighted by occasional flashes of wit and replete with interesting anecdote, is hardly ever high flowing or emphatic, neither is his voice loud nor his gestures marked. Having since then heard him deliver a very large number of addresses in all parts of the Republic and on a wide variety of topics, I regard him as a highly effective public orator. On appearing before an audience his eye seems to take in almost at a glance the collective soul of the crowd, and he at once puts himself in sympathetic contact with that. He speaks without the usual aids of the "spell-binder," and as I have already said, simply, briefly and to the point. Eschewing the flowers of rhetoric and the histrionic postures so much affected by orators of Latin countries, he tells what he knows, unfolds one main idea in each speech, is fluent without exuberance, brief without obscurity and witty without levity. He dispenses with emphasis, gesticulation and jerkiness of every sort. His voice carries far without being loud or strident, combines insinuating softness with impressive force and vibrates with the accents of sincerity. He frequently coins one of those winged phrases which sum up a situation or characterize an event and fly to the furthest ends of the country, where they are long remembered. He seldom descends to repartee, but when he does he never fails to make a point or clench an argument. Interruptions do not put him off the track. Several times his voice was wholly drowned by the untimely appeal of the crazy bells of the cathedral church.

Once in Cordoba, while speaking from a balcony to a vast concourse of people assembled in the public square below, he was nearly forced over the railings by an over-enthusiastic crowd behind, and a moment later was in imminent danger of being felled by great stones hurled by one political faction against another—both of them his ardent supporters. Obregón stood serene and motionless, watching the surging throng in the square below, and then uttered the words that calmed the tempest. This effect, which was indispensable several times during his journeys, was largely the result of that personal magnetism which captivates crowds and also of that other quality of physical strength and vitality which the average man is prone to associate with the right to leadership by the grace of Nature. Ten minutes was the average duration of

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a public speech. It rarely ran to fifteen. But his every discourse was a message. He always contrives to communicate to his hearers a direct interest in the matter dealt with, whether it is education, agriculture or State government. However homely the subject he generally viewed it with a mind permeated with a sense of the vast interests of which it is an integral part.

In a town of the isthmus of Tehuantepec, one day when the temperature suggested that of a blast furnace, Obregón was met by a delegation of working men. As is customary on such occasions, he uncovered his head, on which the scorching rays of the sun played mercilessly. As ill-luck would have it, a conceited young workman in spectacles was the spokesman of the party, and he heaved his recently acquired knowledge in sackfuls on the President, enumerating some twenty philosophers, from Aristotle to Cousin and Saisset, whose names he was unable to pronounce. And for twenty-three minutes Obregón stood there exposed to the danger of sunstroke. I afterwards remonstrated with him for not changing his position.

"If an unscrupulous enemy of yours were to hire an orator to talk long enough while you stood bareheaded in the sun," I remarked, "he could get rid of you without bringing himself within the clutches of the criminal law."

During our stay in the city of Tehuacan I questioned the General about his programme, which he had not yet announced. He replied :

"It is not political. It is ethical. Not politics, but morality. Not the worship of power as something to be respected for itself and obeyed unconditionally, but respect for the rights of others. Not the framing of laws in the belief that these can abolish evil or right every wrong, but the appointment of honest and intelligent men to apply good laws. Not a repetition of former attempts to remedy a chronic injustice by political reforms, but a determined effort to go to the root of the evil and pluck it out.

"And in our international relations what must be aimed at, is not the isolation of Mexico or its aloofness from world affairs, but the frank recognition that the world to-day is one, and that the resources of each country have to be developed, not only for the behoof of the population to whom they

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primarily belong, but also for the benefit of the larger community of mankind. Not the patriotism which exalts ourselves and despises or hates the foreigner, but the cordial welcome extended to all foreigners as useful and necessary fellow-workers."

Every party claimed him for its own and sought to have him as its guest at lunch or dinner. But Obregón made it clear to them that he was outside all parties and a servant of the nation. One day he received a communication that the agents of some American corporation had just arrived in the South and were buying up land there very cheaply to cultivate it, and that it might be well to prevent the transaction. Obregón answered: "On the contrary. Let them come. They will be welcome. We want an infusion of foreign elements."

Then he delivered a speech in which he said :

"Mexico wistfully desires to receive with hearty hospitality all foreigners who are minded to come hither in search of a fair return for their exertions and their capital. She will give every kind of guarantees to all those who with noble and strenuous endeavour will co-operate with us for the welfare of our country."

The organized working classes were especially anxious to enlist Obregón's sympathies and to count upon his active support. And among them in some parts of the Republic were men who had been indoctrinated with ideas of anarchy and who itched for a social revolution which should make short work of capitalists, capital and employers of labour. And some of these in their speeches hinted that their votes depended entirely on his attitude, which must be made clear. Obregón replied at once :

"You may vote as you like. If you can choose me only on my acceptance of your views, you had better seek another candidate."

On his arrival in Atlizco they openly required him to obtain the liberty of two workmen, then in prison on a charge of having wounded one of their employers during a riot. Obregón replied that the workmen had done wrong by taking the law into their own hands. The law exists for all. He could not intervene because he was only a private citizen, and he would not intervene, even if he could, on behalf of anyone in the position of the prisoners. He would endeavour to

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enable the men to get out on bail before their trial, but that was all.

The wife of one of the two workmen, sobbing and entreating, was then brought before him. But he stood his ground.

The labour difficulty in its most malignant aspects faced Obregón in the principal industrial centres, but he made no attempt to capture votes or win sympathies by fine phrases or seductive promises. On the contrary, he courageously undertook to curb the rash and headlong spirit which was openly displayed. With the unhealthy ferment that was working in a section of the labouring classes it would have been comparatively easy to deal if its genesis were exclusively economic, and if its demands were prompted by necessity and moderated by intelligent self-interest. But in many instances the demands sprang from a different source and could neither be complied with nor be satisfied by compliance. For the movement was political in its origin and bolshevist in its subversive aims, and was planned mainly by foreigners who were neither workmen nor artisans, but were in many cases professional agitators from North American or other foreign organizations. The pseudo-Marxist doctrine was introduced into Mexico under Carranza and, according to authentic accounts published by the Mexican Press, the seed was sown by that President's Secretary of State, Aguirre Berlanga, whose intention, however, was only to second his chief's exertions and spread pro-German sentiment regardless of consequences.

That official distributed large sums of money among agitators, and with criminal levity contributed to the establishment and growth of bolshevist notions.\* Funds were also received in abundance from the United States and were spent in propaganda, not among the poor, the homeless, the hunger-stricken, who had real cause for repining, but among the well-paid labourers and artisans in centres of industry and commerce like Orizaba, Veracruz, Mexico City and Puebla, some of whom, although in receipt of wages as high as the same workers in the United States, struck for such remuneration as no enterprise in the world could pay without declaring itself bankrupt.

Obregón's views on labour, its rights and duties are

\* *El Universal*, 27th August, 1920.

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eminently sane, but between theory and practice in Mexico the road to be traversed is long and broken. He holds that the labour difficulty, in so far as it is an economic and social problem and not an offshoot of bolshevism, can be solved only by establishing a just equilibrium of capital, labour and intelligence, all three of which are equally essential to the well-being of the community. None of these factors can be dispensed with and none should be ousted out or crushed by the others. The notion that labour or capital should have things its own way or that the two together can dispense with technical knowledge and general intelligence in conducting an industrial concern is senseless. Even Lenin, the arch-priest of bolshevism, said in March, 1920, as the result of his own experience :

“We must have capable people to work with us, men versed in technique and administration. And we can draw them only from the former ruling class.” He added insidiously : “This it behoves us to do until such time as we have trained proletarian workers for administrative positions.”

General Obregón delivered several masterly speeches on this subject during his “electoral campaign” which made a deep impression on all who heard him. To a deputation of railway men who called on him later on to vent their grievances and announce a strike he put a question as to their wages, and learning that they were being paid more than was given for the same services in the United States, and therefore receiving the highest remuneration on record, he told them bluntly that he had no understanding for their demands and that if they persisted in their untoward action others would soon be found to take their places. He added : “Some of those who possess less than they desire are receiving more than they deserve.” To a man who sought an audience with him at a subsequent date, in order to discuss the workmen’s demands, he sent the reply that he would not receive him because he was an army colonel receiving his pay, who had never done a stroke of manual work and was playing the part of a professional agitator to boot.

By word and deed in Atlizco, Merida and other parts of the Republic he opened the eyes of many well-meaning people who had been beguiled by interested demagogues or political fanatics. But his cherished idea was to deal with that and

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all other problems that affect humanity as a whole in a parliament of peoples, for which the ground should first be carefully prepared.

In Yucatan,\* where these insistent, cajoling and blood-thirsty orators were numerous, he delivered the following address :

“An upheaval such as has shaken our country for ten years invariably leaves a residue of men who refuse to live by their labour and who forgather to offer incense to those who are on their way to power. Their object is by this means to get within reach of the treasury of the nation. There are others too, who become agitators of the masses in order to live by their doctrines. Now it is my duty when I take over the reins of power—and already a great majority of my fellow citizens have designated me for the post—to see that the intentions of these social drones, who are thus striving to reach the budget, shall be thwarted. And it behoves you as working people to make sure that no response shall be accorded by the labouring classes to those whose sole object is to live comfortably by the sweat of your brow and by their own more or less corrosive doctrines.”†

A week previously, in Campeche, where the cry of “Mexico for the Mexicans” was heard and licence was preached in lieu of liberty, Obregón delivered a speech, of which the following extracts will convey an idea :

“It has been a relatively easy matter for the majority of the peoples of the globe to bring their struggles for liberty to a triumphant issue. But it has been essentially difficult for those same peoples to make a proper use of that liberty when acquired. Nearly always we find them prostituting it and confounding it with libertinage. Now it is of the greatest moment that we should steer clear of this unpardonable error. . . . It is our duty to throw open our frontiers to men of all lands who bring us elements of morality and culture and come for the purpose of combining their efforts with ours to extract from our prodigal soil the riches which are to become the basis of our future well-being. On the other hand, however, it is our duty to close our frontiers and our ports and, if needs be, to reconstruct the legendary walls of Campeche, in order

\* Puerto de Progrésio.

† Speech delivered on September 11th, 1920.



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to keep out all those filibusters who are seeking an entrance here to exploit our unsophisticated classes with their dissolvent and anarchical doctrines."

He was never tired of saying that Mexico's riches belonged to humanity and must not be allowed to lie unexploited. "We are all opposed," he said, "to latifundia in our own country, to the possession by an individual of an enormous estate which he cannot possibly cultivate and most of which lies unproductive. Should we change our stand and make of our Republic a vast unproductive estate among the nations of the earth? No. We must be reasonable and consistent."

An incident occurred in the State of Tabasco between him and the Governor, General Green, which brought out some of Obregón's best characteristics. He had been hospitably received by that official and also by the President of the Municipality. The Governor and the entire town council were zealous adherents of Obregón and welcomed him to their State with great joy. In Frontera a festive reception was held and speeches were made. Suddenly the President of the Chamber openly accused Governor Green of the most lawless acts, and among other things of imposing on the city his own favourites as members of the Municipality, instead of having them elected as the Constitution prescribes. Now the Governor and the Municipality were omnipotent in Tabasco. Obregón looked at the accused men in silence. Then he signified his readiness to hear them clear themselves of the charge. But they were silent. Other persons confirmed the accusations as eye-witnesses. Green or his official secretary whispered to me, so that Obregón should hear it, something about the necessity of employing drastic measures in order to save the party from the rampant reaction which disposed of a majority of voters in the State. "It was for Obregón's cause that we did it," they urged. Many a European statesman would have accepted the plea and condoned the disregard of the law. Obregón turned to his hearers and said:

"I am pained beyond words at what I have heard. The misdeeds which have been brought home to the Governor and the Municipality are the negation of the liberty for which we have been struggling for years. They constitute an injustice as odious as any of those against which we have been fighting, and I tell you unhesitatingly that if these things had

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been brought to my cognizance before I would have refused to accept the invitation of the Municipality which has been imposed upon you thus illegally."

Thunders of applause greeted this utterance. The Governor and the secretary afterwards explained that the partisans of the revolution were in the minority in Tabasco and their only hope was to strain the law. "And now, unless Obregón stands by us, we shall fall. It was for his cause that we had recourse to irregularities and it is his interest to see that we do not suffer thereby." When these words were reported to Obregón, he answered:

"If injustice be the price of my success, I will barter success for justice."\*

In most parts of the country the administration was lax and the interests of the community were sacrificed almost as a matter of course to those of the administrators. Nobody seemed to know or care what was going on. The roads, full of holes and hillocks, were well-nigh impassable and looked in some places as though they had been torn to pieces by a seismic convulsion. The lighting of the towns was fitful and uncertain and some important places were often left in darkness.† The city of Campeche, with its fine old colonial buildings, was fast falling into decay. Later on, in the North, Obregón visited one of the greatest dams on the American continent,‡ which disposes of forty-five thousand horse-power, yet the town itself was in Cimmerian gloom. In some towns lepers walked about as freely as healthy people and almost everywhere the conditions were so insanitary that infection had a vast field and was ploughing it.

Obregón's views on women were expressed in a brief masterly speech delivered in Palizada.§ He dwelt, however, more on the services which they had rendered to the cause of law and order in the past than on their social position and vocation generally. Hence it would be a mistake to suppose that his remarks connote a desire to effect a radical change in the reciprocal relations of the two sexes.

\* General Green has since become a rebel.

† For example, the town of Puerto Mexico, which is a port on the Gulf. The city of Campeche was even worse off.

‡ Camargo.

§ In the State of Campeche.

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As has already been pointed out, Obregón has never cultivated false modesty. He is conscious of his own qualities and is sincere enough not to feign the contrary. But he is none the less alive to his shortcomings and anxious to correct them. To his lack of experience in certain departments of the State is to be attributed the circumstance that his choice of men has sometimes been the reverse of felicitous. This is a delicate matter, seeing that, as he made the selection in good faith and with the conviction, which he still retains, that it was the best under the circumstances, it would be an invidious and perhaps a hopeless task to seek to prove to him that he was mistaken.

And yet he foresaw such stumbles, foretold them, and invoked the indulgence of the nation. In a speech delivered at a banquet offered to him by a number of bankers\* he said:

“Many among ourselves lack the training necessary for a task of the magnitude of that which is now pressing on our shoulders. But I console myself with the reflection that we shall compensate for this insufficiency of preparation by the energies deployed during our struggle and by the integrity of all, or at any rate of the greater part, of the men who are now taking over the public administration.”

After his election to the presidency he was congratulated by many on his triumph, but he declined to regard it as a triumph. He told his hearers that the day on which he might fitly be congratulated was that on which he should lay down the powers conferred upon him, and then only if he had proven by real reforms that he deserved the trust placed in him by the nation. Thereupon I said to him:

“You speak of your triumph as possible only when you quit office after having accomplished your mission. But you will never accomplish it fully. Such triumphs are seldom vouchsafed to idealists. These men resemble Moses, who led his people up to a spot from where they could behold the Promised Land, but he could not take them across its frontiers. On the other hand, the humdrum man of action cannot dispense with success, which is the breath of his nostrils. With the idealist it is different.”

To these remarks Obregón made no reply at the time. But in a speech delivered a day or two later,† he said:

\* In December, 1920. See *Excelsior*, December 5th, 1920.

† On the island of Carmen, on September 3rd, 1920.

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"It may not be given to me to embody the principles and realize the aspirations for which we have made such heavy sacrifices during the long struggle now over, but I shall at least have the solace of remembering that they continually inspired my action, and that the seed will have been sown in abundance of which the fruit will be reaped by my country and humanity by and by."

On the subject of education, as well as in his high hopes for the future of humanity, General Obregón's ideas so closely approach those of Condorcet that one might feel tempted to regard him as a disciple of that famous French thinker if one were unaware of the fact that he has never read his works. His suggestive observations on the education of children, on the instruction of the peasants and on professional training are obviously the result of much thought operating on long personal experience. I heard him deliver a speech in the high school of Puebla on the intellectual, moral and professional training of the youth of the country which caused the young men, and some of the striplings who had slipped into the hall and eagerly listened to it, to surround his motor when he was leaving and ply him with numerous questions and press their services on him. Some of the professors enthusiastically declared that if the theory of the formation of character which, according to them, underlay his proposals were systematically applied in the schools the new birth of Mexico would be realized in a generation. But the people who are to be experimented upon are less amenable to verbal teaching than is commonly assumed. They have much to forget before they can begin to learn. And one of the first difficulties will be to find them suitable masters. Two sentences of that discourse struck me as indicating that his estimate of the cultural level of the people was wholly free from chauvinism :

"The origin of our national disasters," he said, "undoubtedly has its roots in the lack of culture which marks our people. . . . Ignorance in our country has extended its tents with slight exceptions over the entire area of the Republic. And it is peremptorily necessary that we put forth all the energy of which we are capable to combat it until it has been dissipated."

Obregón's versatility and wide range of practical knowledge were amazing. Whithersoever he went he made himself

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acquainted with the multifarious needs of the district or State, eliminated all but the more pressing requirements and framed plans for providing for those. The draining of rivers, the construction of waterways, railways and highways, the organization of a service of transports for the export of fruits and fish were a few of the problems that exercised his ingenuity. Even the lesser cultural demands found a ready response.

In the State of Oaxaca\* he went to visit a venerable tree belonging to the cypress family, which is 162 feet high. Its branches measure 141 feet. Humboldt believed it to be the oldest organism on the globe. Four feet above the ground it measures 160 feet in girth. And it is still perfectly healthy and growing, although its age is believed to be many thousand years. This tree was in the churchyard a short distance from the Church, and without any protection. Obregón, as soon as he became President, had it railed off and gave orders to make it the centre of a little national park, and to purchase the necessary land for the State.

While he was still in Veracruz, on the home journey, reports were circulated that a plot had been hatched to assassinate him. These rumours, which were somewhat circumstantial, came from the United States. Nothing would have been easier than to perpetrate a crime of that sort. Six or seven times a day, and occasionally at night, Obregón was swayed hither and thither by surging and enthusiastic crowds that almost crushed him. But no harm befell him.

When warned of the alleged plot and entreated to mix in crowds no more, he refused point-blank and said :

“My friends have often given me what they considered to be good advice, which, in spite of their excellent intentions, I did not take. Neither can I take this. Ever since our births we have been continually escaping death. During the war I was wont to tell my soldiers that life is very valuable so long as you despise it. And I am of the opinion that the same maxim holds good in peace time.”

\* About twenty-five minutes' railway ride from the city of Oaxaca.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### OBREGÓN'S PERSONALITY

IN the course of his various journeys during President de la Huerta's term of office, Obregón strove to throw his thoughts into shape with a view to commencing his official work in December, 1920. The accomplished lady who, as we saw, was betrothed to him at the critical moment when he lay wounded and seemingly dying on the battlefield of Leon y Trinidad had since then become his wife\* and borne him three children. He fetched them from Nogales, and chose for his official residence in the capital, not the Palace of Chapultepec, where most of his predecessors had lived, but a very modest little house hard by in the beautiful park.

The family life of the Obregón's, like that of many Mexican and Spanish families, is in some respects an idyll. The relations between husband and wife in those countries oftentimes resemble those which are described or alluded to by the chroniclers of the days of chivalry. The modern and more particularly the futurist spirit, which was born with the world-war, is wholly unknown. The woman enjoys a position which is in many ways privileged, but would hardly be regarded as an ideal existence by the typical women of the twentieth century in English-speaking lands. Mexican women, like those of Japan, have the reputation of being among the most devoted wives and mothers on the globe. And they fully deserve it.

Between the maxims of his private and those of his public life Obregón makes no distinction. What would be dishonest or untruthful in the former he deems equally so in the latter. "There is not," he says, "one morality for the private citizen and another for the public servant. The same standard is applicable to both." If this criterion were generally adopted

\* Obregón was married to Señorita Maria Tapia on March 2nd, 1916, at Hermosillo.

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the distance between politicians and misdemeanants would be lessened to an alarming extent.

Physically Obregón is powerfully and symmetrically built. Tall, sinewy, well proportioned and good-looking, he was a veritable Hercules before he lost his right arm. In this respect he bore a certain resemblance to Tsar Alexander III., who could take a thick iron poker and bend it on his knee. His complexion is florid, his head and forehead are large, and his blue eyes—Irish eyes one might call them, so deep, soft and lambent is their light—are usually charged with a magnetism which it is not easy to resist, although I can also imagine them darting forth flashes of scorn and indignation that paralyse him who provoked them. And yet, although I have sometimes seen his patience and forbearance tried to the snapping point, I have never seen him lose his self-control. His voice is soft, tuneful and suasive in private conversation—a great asset for a man who must and will often say “no” to his best friends. His smiling face is a charm against mischance and a lure to good fortune. Most people take him to be about forty-five years old. In reality he is four years younger.

The first, last and permanent impression left by Obregón on all who have dealings with him is that he is as straight as a die, a man of his word, who possesses a conscience and is incapable of overstepping the bounds which it traces for his conduct.

Since his journeys over the Republic he has become the symbol and focussing centre of such moral energies as Mexico possesses to-day, and of this the people are intensely conscious. That in truth is the main source of his far-reaching influence over the Mexican nation, and the principal ground for the high hopes which have been centred in him since then.

His conversation with friends moves with a steady flow of animal spirits over a wide range of topics. It often contains the sublimated essence of fine observations spiced with amusing anecdotes. With his exceptionally retentive memory he can recall the noteworthy events and episodes of his life from childhood onwards, while with his talent for word-painting he clothes the actors with the forms and colours of reality anew. But he never soliloquizes nor tires his hearers nor becomes petulant or dogmatic. And he is an excellent listener. In manner and demeanour Obregón is simple and dignified. In discussion

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he is not afraid to modify his views if adequate grounds are adduced. And together with his judgment he gives you the considerations that led him to form it. He takes no ideas on credit.

Although full of humour and of human nature, Obregón is not what is called a boon companion. The pleasures of the table have as little attraction for him as have the luxuries of the new-rich. He lives as simply as he lived before he was President, General or military officer. He firmly believes in measure. In his moral code vice is excess, and even virtue, unduly exaggerated, becomes a vice. Hence he is neither a bigot nor an enthusiast. Still less is he a Puritan. He enters blithely into human nature in its entire diapason and makes ample allowance for most of the frailties, stumbles and backslidings of others. But not for all. He is possessed, for example, with an almost passionate loathing for venality, especially for that form of it which consists in the selling of brains and the hiring of "convictions." That, in his category of vices, is a class of its own, and is inexpiable. Possibly his refusal to buy adversaries or to subsidize newspapers is a consequence of this detestation of the crime of poisoning the wells of truth.

In many respects he seems to have developed considerably since he first left his home for the field of battle. His enthusiasm has been regulated, his conceptions of patriotism and politics have been rectified, his impatience of other people's errors has been tempered by the contemplation of his own. But some of the wheat has unavoidably gone the way of the tares. In his youth, when books were scarce, he was a voracious reader. To-day he peruses only what is necessary to the conscientious discharge of his duties. In his early days he also, like one of his gifted sisters, was fond of writing verses, the best of which are still extant.

Obregón is an early riser. He appears at table with a smile in his eye and a joke on his lips. His breakfast is light, generally a cup of coffee. The midday meal is more varied and abundant, and consists of two or three Mexican dishes. Water or milk—very rarely a glass of claret—is his beverage. And supper is a replica of lunch. In the evening he indulges in one of his favourite games, poker or billiards, in both of which, in spite of the loss of his right arm, he is an expert. Riding, hunting,



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tennis and shooting—he is an excellent marksman—are his outdoor amusements. He retires to rest reasonably early, if his occupations allow him, otherwise he goes on working until the early hours of the morning. He can compose himself to sleep at any time and in any position, even on horseback, and can therefore make up for lost time.

Obregón comes from a part of Mexico where longevity is, so to say, endemic. When visiting at his house there I met a general who had served in many wars and was bright, active and loquacious.

“How old do you take me to be?” he asked me, at the close of a long conversation.

“About fifty-five or six,” I replied.

“I am eighty-one,” he asserted triumphantly.

Seeing that his hair was dense and dark and his teeth undecayed, I received the statement with unexpressed scepticism, contenting myself with the remark that he doubtless came of a long-lived family. To this he assented, adding: “We are all long-lived in this part of the Republic.”

“How old was your father when he died?” I inquired.

“My father has not died,” he answered. “He married again two years ago. He lives in the village and is well.”

I afterwards learned that these statements were absolutely correct.\*

I have never seen Obregón despondent or gloomy, although I have been with him at times when he had ample grounds to be both. For he invariably discerns a hopeful element in the most depressing mishaps, and his habit of viewing things through a medium which, without being fatalism, produces the soothing effects of this on the temper, enables him to allow the flow of animal spirits to go on uninterruptedly. Moreover, like many of his countrymen, he possesses absolute control over his feelings and their outward expression.

A few days after his right arm was amputated he was busily giving orders to the members of his staff, for the moment was the most decisive of the war. His elder brother came unexpectedly to see him just then, and was hardly recognized by the officers on duty owing to his having shaved off his moustache. José's visit was announced to Alvaro, and the friends of the two feared lest the first impressions of the former, on

\* The individual in question is General Cruz.

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seeing his brother one-handed, should be visibly painful. But the moment the door opened the General, glancing at his brother's long face, said :

" Well, Pepe, I declare you look worse off without your moustache than I do without my arm. You are a sight for the gods ! "

Whereupon they both laughed heartily and the conversation entered at once into its normal channels.

How little Obregón's character was known to his own fellow countrymen down to a relatively recent date, and how successfully propaganda had been working to defame him, will appear from the following incident. A foreign lady with whom I became acquainted complained to me that her land in the provinces was being taken from her without compensation, and in flat contradiction to assurances that had been given to her by one of the Cabinet Ministers, and she asked me where she could find redress. At this time Obregón had just become President, and I suggested that she should endeavour to see him personally and acquaint him with the facts.

" See Obregón personally ? " she exclaimed. " Never. I would not go near him. I have heard enough about him to know that it would be worse than foolish to approach such a man."

I told her that I knew no other way of having her wrongs righted at once, and I added that she was wholly mistaken as to his character and demeanour. A couple of weeks later she called on me and said :

" I want to thank you for your advice. After some hesitation I followed it. It has kept my property from being expropriated. I went to General Obregón and laid the matter before him. He was charming. He inquired into the matter in all its details, read the documents and saw the justice of my demand. He then at once gave orders to have my land left intact. And what is more, he sent his adjutant with me to the department to see that the order was transmitted without delay. He was most amiable and kind. He is a perfect gentleman. I was indeed misinformed about him."

A somewhat amusing occurrence was the result of a similar appeal to Obregón's sense of justice. And it had a very different upshot. On board the little Mexican steamer which was conveying him from Guaymas on the Pacific to Mazatlan, there

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was a curious individual of unknown origin who cultivated a patriarchal beard, affected a curious costume and gave himself out for a prophet come to announce the end of time. He had passed himself off as a Russian until I questioned him in that language and found that he could express himself fluently only in Spanish, and belonged, in all probability, to the race to which most of the prophets known to us belonged. Some years before he had "converted" to his doctrines a cultured young school-mistress who, when touched by grace, gave up her social position, abandoned her relatives and shared the privations and miseries of the prophet on his wanderings. Being a passable singer and performer on the piano, she enabled him to turn an honest penny by her entertainments. But generally speaking the pair lived in squalor, without a home, a butt for the gibes of the unbelieving generation, which, however, is kind-hearted enough not to let them want for bread.

The Messiah, as he was sometimes called, employed his time on board the steamer in a futile endeavour to convince a company of soldiers that he was the inspired herald of the world's last days, and that it behoved them to leave everything and follow him. This might have been construed as an attempt at disaffection, but Mexicans are tolerant, and the soldiers first made fun of the Messiah and finally threatened to heave him overboard unless he desisted. But he kept harping on the string that grated on the soldiers' ears, and then he ran off to General Obregón and appealed to his sense of justice.

"The soldiers threaten to kill me. My life is not safe here. I bespeak your protection."

Obregón, who knew that the soldiers were but joking, said :

"You are a prophet, I think you told me ? "

"Yes. I am a prophet, but the soldiers are unbelievers and want to beat or kill me."

"Well, you surely must know how prophets have usually fared in this hard, selfish world. In Biblical days they were slain with the sword, and they sometimes had worse treatment even than that. If you are going to play the part, play it properly. Don't grumble at the fate it has in store for you. Lay down your life for your faith."

When talking one day on the subject of responsibility, Obregón, in reply to a question of mine, said :

"No man can be expected to supervise every Department

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of the Republic, and verify the work done in each. As President my method will be what it was on the field. I shall appoint to each Department an individual who, to the best of my opinion, is fully competent for the work, not only intellectually but morally. And so long as I discern no motive for withdrawing my confidence from him, I will allow him full scope. If for any reason he fail to justify my trust I will give him a successor. The head of an enterprise—military, governmental or industrial—cannot afford to spend time wrangling about details. He is supposed to have put these in the hands of conscientious experts. And that is exactly what I am about to do."

There is no doubt about the soundness of that general principle. But I confess I always had certain misgivings, which events have not since dispelled, that there might be a flaw somewhere in applying it. The Kaiser appointed Moltke to be Chief of the Staff because he felt certain that he could not find a better man for the post. Moltke himself was of the contrary opinion and tried to get his imperial master to act upon it, but was overruled. One consequence of this was the abandonment of the plan of campaign drawn up by Moltke's predecessor, von Schlieffen, which would have given the German army Paris in 1914 at the cost of a few towns occupied by the Tsar's troops in East Prussia. Again, the Emperor Franz Josef appointed Count Berchtold to be Minister of Foreign Affairs in Austria-Hungary, believing him to be the best qualified man he could discover. Berchtold held the opposite opinion very strongly, expressed it to the monarch very frankly, and implored him to choose someone more competent. Franz Josef insisted and appealed to the loyalty of his subject, who felt obliged to give way. One result of this appointment was the loss of a splendid opportunity for settling the Austro-Serbian misunderstanding, and the fatal plunge into war.

Obregón is an excellent judge of men, and made several fine appointments during the civil war and after it. But there have also been cases in which he was no less firmly convinced of the wisdom of certain of his selections than were William II. and Franz Josef of theirs—and with as meagre grounds, but happily without the like disastrous consequences. And yet the defects which the President does not suspect are known to most outsiders who are interested in the subject.

That was and is a source of danger.

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Obregón has been accused of personal ambition, the besetting sin and potent incentive of most of his predecessors in the presidency. The reader will have noticed that throughout his career there is not a trace of it to be discovered in his acts or words. And this not because of a lack of opportunity or temptation.

As we have seen, he never craved nor prepared for a political or a military vocation—although these were then the main avenues to power. As for politics and diplomacy, he conceived a strong dislike for both from the first. He remarked to me on the subject :

“Ever since events forced me to inquire into the main causes of our lamentable situation and to compare our recent past with that of such foreign states as I know anything about, I have felt strongly that the first step which Mexico must take in order to recover lost ground and get into line with cultured nations is to substitute morality for politics and diplomacy. Politics, together with its inseparable adjuncts, inordinate ambitions, turgid rhetoric, delusive promises and insidious intrigues, have wrought havoc among many peoples, and nowhere more thoroughly than among our own. It is at once our interest and our duty therefore to emancipate ourselves from their yoke now that fortune has afforded us the opportunity.”

Obregón received a proposal to enter Parliament and devote himself to politics soon after he had taken up arms against the fomenters of civil war. The prospect would have tempted many of his comrades, but he rejected it unhesitatingly.

“It is not by laws which are not enforced, nor by talk which stands for no constructive ideas,” he said, “that the evils which crush our people are to be remedied. Some laws foment crime in lieu of suppressing it, and parliamentary rhetoric very often hinders the adoption of effective remedies. We must put the axe to the roots, and these lie in the region of the ethical.”

His first initiation into practical politics took place when his former military chief, Victoriano Huerta, kicked over the traces and arrested President Madero. Obregón was at that time, as we saw, a fairly well-to-do farmer who had theretofore had no inclination to forsake his avocation for a life of adventure, political or military. But he felt intensely that

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he must lend a hand at all costs in putting an end to the long sequence of disorders which rendered life in the Republic a burden.

"I felt irresistibly impelled to go," he said, "and I paid no heed to the possible consequences of my resolve, either to myself or to my kindred."

Obregón's next confrontation with political issues carried with it a second and more seductive temptation. It took place in the year 1914 and disillusioned him painfully. At that time the schism in the militant revolutionary party which subsequently well-nigh ruined the Republic was being conceived by Villa. That general, as has been recounted in a previous chapter, urged him to leave Carranza to his own resources and offered him the presidency as his reward.

"The destinies of the Republic are in your hands and mine," he said. "United we shall dominate the country in a twinkling, and then, as I am a grey, obscure, uncultured individual, the presidency will be yours."

Obregón was not to be seduced from allegiance to the cause which he set above every other consideration and interest. And as Carranza, with all his faults, was for the moment the centre and rallying point for all the forces that were marshalled against lawlessness and civil war, he stood firmly by him.

Such was the spirit which actuated his every public act.

It may well be that, in the course of time, Obregón, mentally measuring his own personality with that of the men whom he had helped to make the rulers of the Republic, discerned that his own political ascendancy was an indispensable postulate of the success of the revolutionary cause. If so, his conclusion is in harmony with all the evidence available, and there is surely nothing reprehensible in a man's conviction—especially when borne out by the judgment of his fellow men—that he is as necessary to the stabilization of the new order of things as he was to its inauguration. Mexico has a task of tremendous difficulty and extreme delicacy to attack, and, so far as one can judge, there is no man in the Republic who possesses anything approaching Obregón's qualifications to grapple with it. Is it to be supposed that for all his acumen he is the only one to be unaware of the fact? Some men's psychic and mental workings are so complex as to elude analysis. The bewildering cross-

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play of their unconscious tendencies and deliberate acts disconcerts general judgment. Obregón is not one of this category. He holds too tenaciously to the guiding thread of reason and is far too impatient of vacillation to rank as a Hamletesque nature.

One day, during his southern tour, after a series of ovations unprecedented in Mexico, I was talking to him about popularity, and he said :

“Popularity ? Those who seek it don’t know what it is, and those who do never seek it.”

On another occasion we were discussing Venizelos and the ingratitude of the Greek people towards a leader who, whatever may be his shortcomings, achieved what they themselves considered most conducive to their interests.

Obregón exclaimed :

“There is at least one thing constant in the world.”

“And that is ? ” I asked.

“Inconstancy.”

A writer who was a sage and a poet left it on record that :

“The hardest punishment for a man who himself declines to govern is to have to support the rule of one who is worse than himself. Dread of this is what moves conscientious persons—whenever it does move them—to take over the reins of power. Then they enter upon the post of ruler, not as though it were something worth striving after or because it offers an agreeable existence in office, but because they are convinced that it is indispensable and that there is no superior or equal to whom the position could be assigned.”

That writer was Plato.\*

Surveying Obregón’s life from his youth to the present stage of his career, we are struck above all by its oneness. It is as though he had had Goethe’s maxim ever before him and had striven to harmonize the beginning, the middle and the end.

\* “Republic,” I ; chapter xii.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SISYPHUS' TASK FOR HERCULES

THE new situation in which Mexico found herself since the fall of Carranza was highly disappointing to many. It was gall and wormwood to all those foreigners and natives who were reckoning upon intervention on the part of the United States, and had adjusted their various political, financial and economic plans to that. One and all, they called themselves "Friends of Mexico," and professed a sincere desire to see law and order established there, but held that only the troops of the United States could achieve this feat. Regeneration from within they rejected offhand, and as for Obregón and the would-be Mexican regenerators, they labelled them bandits and deemed that that settled the matter.

The influential Press organs of the United States published articles in which compassion for the Mexican people and the necessity of helping them to a return to "normalcy" were feelingly expressed. Senator Fall, who had devoted many months to drawing up a list of all the outrages and crimes committed in the Republic over a long span of years, was pressing forward with all speed to the conclusion of this *magnum opus* of his life, and to the recommendations which he was about to make to the Senate. Provisional President de la Huerta was set down as a visionary with whom it would be loss of time to negotiate. Obregón was said to be suffering from some incurable disease, and also to be doomed to die at the hands of assassins. Bets were freely made in Mexico City by foreigners that he would never become President, and large odds continued to be given up to within a couple of hours of his installation.

It was all the more agreeable to Obregón, therefore, to find that the American people, as distinguished from the professional politicians, assessed aright the great change that had



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come over the Republic, and desired to see the attitude of their own Government adjusted to that. The States of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona openly demanded immediate recognition. Chambers of commerce, associations and business firms of various other States seconded the demand. And Obregón, the President-elect, was invited to attend the El Paso Exhibition and the Dallas Fair in Texas.

He accepted the invitation, and I accompanied him on the long and interesting tour.

Everywhere in the United States his journey was a triumphal march. In El Paso he was welcomed by the Governors of New Mexico, Texas and Arizona. Twenty-five thousand persons cheered him in the streets, and an audience of eight thousand proclaimed that the time had come for Mexico to be officially recognized by Washington. Governor Campbell, of Arizona, claiming to know Obregón better than most people, said :

“ We here have seen him go to school. We have seen him rise in the world. We have seen him fight for his country. Therefore we admire him.”\*

At the Dallas Fair seventeen thousand persons forgathered to greet Obregón, and nearly as many welcomed him at Fort Worth.

Obregón's public speeches—of which he was sometimes obliged to deliver six in one day—were marked by fine feeling and good taste. In some of these his ideas about the larger community of mankind and the necessity of removing the principal barriers to universal co-operation for common ends found appropriate expression, as in the conclusion of his discourse in El Paso :

“ Circumstance has decreed that the peoples of the American continent shall be brothers in deed, and not in name only. Let us execute that decree. Peace, therefore, and fraternal relations should characterize our intercourse. It is our duty as well as our interest to combine, not against the interests of any other State, but for the good of ourselves and humanity. To begin with, war must be abolished. The recent world-conflict, which has destroyed much and created nothing, has proved the utter uselessness of brute force as a means of settling difficulties or solving problems. It has likewise shown

\* *El Paso Herald*, October 8th, 1920.

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the impotence of diplomatic formulas, and the necessity of peoples frankly meeting peoples and effecting a union whereby the welfare of each and all may be guaranteed.”\*

Answering the hopes expressed by his hosts that his Government would shortly be recognized by the Washington State Department, Obregón said :

“Henceforward Mexico will cease to be a problem for other peoples of the globe, and more especially for the United States. Mexico in future will perform no act incompatible with morality or right. And no nation calling itself civilized can insist on her swerving from this line of conduct.

“The reverence in which we hold the memory of our reformer, Benito Juárez, amounts almost to worship. Well, Juárez said : ‘Respect for the rights of our neighbours is peace.’ Now it is our resolve to respect the rights of each and all of the nations of the earth and of each and all of the citizens, native and foreign, who reside in the territory of our Republic. And, having proven by acts that we can and do carry out this resolve, surely we shall have established a claim for ourselves to the respect of all other peoples. . . .

“Mexico recognizes and will ever continue to recognize all the legal promises which she may have made within and beyond her frontiers, and will redeem them in full, thus re-establishing her credit and safeguarding her dignity.”†

In another address on the same subject he thus envisages the possibility of a refusal on the part of the United States to recognize the legally constituted Government of Mexico :

“Comparing the present conjuncture with that which confronted us a twelvemonth ago, I must aver that we are much more contented now than we then were, notwithstanding the circumstance that we were then officially recognized by the North American Government, whereas that recognition has not been accorded to us yet. If I were asked to give our grounds for this satisfaction, I would answer : Because at that time the official recognition was neutralized by the absence of the confidence and the friendship of the North American people, whereas, although we are not recognized officially to-day, we have the compensation of enjoying the affection and confidence of the entire people of the United States. And if it

\* Cf. *El Paso Morning Times*, October 7th, 1920.

† Extract from a speech delivered in Dallas, October 16th, 1920.

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were impossible for us to have both, I would not hesitate to choose the respect and friendship of the people of the United States rather than official recognition.”\*

As an indication of the bent of Obregón’s mind in the direction of a new scheme of world relations, it may not be amiss to quote from another speech which he addressed a few months before to a mixed audience of Mexicans and North Americans at Nogales, on the frontier line between the two Republics:†

“Henceforward, a frank understanding among all the peoples of the Continent, on the basis of mutual respect and absolute equity, will form the backbone of America, and offer the most trustworthy guarantee for the future of all those peoples.

“Since the last war, which for several years stirred the world to its depths, civilization has been moving through unwonted channels, allotting but a secondary part to brute force. The time is now drawing near when the mightiest people will not be that one which chances to possess most heavy guns, but that other which knows how to acquire the most widespread sympathy among the other nations of the earth.

“Since the latest political movement in our own country, which has restored to us all our rights, we too are minded to guide our people along new paths, which run parallel to our national aspirations and to the newly manifested tendencies of humanity.

“Without the shadow of a doubt, it is to morality and to culture that the world of the future will look for guidance and direction. And we, in harmony with this new tendency, will gladly throw open our frontiers and fraternally stretch out our arms to all men of good-will who bear with them these two elements of progress and come to co-operate with us for the advancement of our country.

“At the outset of this new political life, which will harmonize with our aspirations, we desire to see effaced all those former incidents which, emanating from a variety of causes, sundered us from the other peoples of the earth. We are eager to inaugurate an era of concord which shall strengthen more

\* Extract from a speech delivered at Fort Worth (Texas) on October 17th, 1920.

† On July 4th, 1920.

## Sisyphus' Task for Hercules

and more as time lapses our amicable relations with foreign nations."\*

A passage from another address may bear reproduction here as evidence of the broad view adopted by Obregón regarding two of the principal elements of nationalism of the narrow, intolerant type :

"In bygone ages the chief hindrances to the fomenting of harmony and neighbourly intercourse among peoples were language and religion. We men of modern times and civilization have come to see that this ought not to be so, because language and religion are accidents in bringing about which the individual has the least share. No mortal chooses his parents or the place of his birth.

"The ties that really bind nations to-day are morality and culture. One may employ any idiom and profess any religion, without ceasing to be essentially moral. . . . The legislation of all progressive peoples adopts as its fundamental principles absolute respect for religion and absolute freedom of thought. Two individuals or two nations can profess different religions and yet be good friends. They may express themselves in different tongues and be good friends. But no two individuals or peoples can be good friends if one of them is prone to do evil while the other does his best to live up to a high moral standard."†

Meanwhile in Mexico the population was slowly settling down. De la Huerta's personal example and public administration were at once an assurance and a sedative. This generous President drew large cheques on the future politico-social bank of the nation, which it became his successor's duty and pleasure to meet. "Intimate friends" of Mr. Harding visited Mexico by the score, interviewed everybody of note there, and on their departure gave unsolicited promises to make favourable reports of what they had seen and heard in that hospitable Republic. Representatives of oil companies discussed their hopes and fears with the Provisional President and made plausible suggestions, now to him, now to Obregón, which, if accepted by either, would have estranged these two statesmen from each other and driven a wedge into the party of law and order which was in process of organization.

\* Cf. *The Nogales Herald*, July 7th, 1920.

† Extract from a speech delivered in October, 1920.

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As soon as it first became evident that, in spite of open opposition and underground intrigues, Obregón would be charged with the task of disentangling the ravelled skein of Mexican affairs, those who were materially interested in that Republic sought to win him over to their side, while the professional politicians contented themselves with watching, waiting and preparing for their own innings. Among the courses open to the men who had those material interests at heart, one was to seek personal contact with the coming President and endeavour to convince or persuade him of the justice of their claims, the moderation of their exigencies and their readiness to display gratitude for future favours. And repeated overtures were made for the purpose, but they were baulked, first by Obregón's resolute attitude and then by the Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico. This body joined hands with the extreme group of politicians in Washington who had inscribed Cubanization\* on their banner, and also with another set of people who took their stand on the religious question and laid down the principle that the repeal of Mexican legislation on this subject was hopeless without a change in the Constitution and *præter-diplomatic* pressure.

When all those manœuvres failed of their object a new line was tried. Advances were made to the ambitious enemies of the new administration, and, it is credibly asserted, were followed up with large financial contributions which were devoted to the rigging out of a new revolution. Flattery, cajolery, gloomy predictions and financial help were thus among the arms employed by the various foreign bodies interested in keeping the Republic simmering in a state of anarchy.

"The residue" left by the civil war of men of baffled hopes, countered ambitions and ended careers was numerous, active and confident. All that they needed to engineer a successful revolution was money. And money was accordingly vouchsafed them. But, by way of making assurance doubly sure, well-thought-out efforts were put forth to introduce into Obregón's future Cabinet some of the handy men of the great Yankee companies. Señor X.—a resident in the United States—hurriedly qualified for office in what he deemed to be an effective way, and his name was privately suggested to Obregón as an

\* Cubanization is the degradation of a Latin-American republic to a state of tutelage under the guardianship of North American financiers and politicians.

## Sisyphus' Task for Hercules

excellent Minister. General Y.—who was also hand in glove with the North American “Friends of Mexico”—was likewise proposed in various roundabout ways as War Minister, and at the same time an assurance was given that his appointment would go far to soften the hearts of Washington politicians of the stamp of Senator Fall. And some of the “intimate friends of Mr. Harding,” whose name was legion, seconded the proposals and endorsed the promises.

Senator Fall himself was ready to meet General Obregón. Zealous individuals on both sides wrote letters and advanced statements which they ascribed to the American Senator or the Mexican President-elect, with good intentions, but without authority from these personages. Hence the failure of their exertions to bring about a meeting.\* On the Yankee side perfect readiness was expressed by interventionist politicians in the Senate to make Obregón an adoptive son of the Washington State Department and to enable him to follow in the steps of Porfirio Diaz. If he needed credit, it would be lavished on him; troops, if his own proved untrustworthy, would be at his beck and call from the United States. In a word, Mexico would be made as clay in his hands on condition that he accepted the potter's wheel and the design of the vessels fashioned in Washington.

Obregón's replies to these overtures, when he deigned to reply, were what we should expect from a man of his experience, convictions and integrity.

At last, in spite of prophecies, bets, conspiracies, projected revolutions and “incurable ailments,” Obregón was sworn in President of the Republic at midnight on December 1st, 1920, in presence of the Mexican Legislature and also of some State Governors and other influential personages from the great northern Republic.

The arduous work of reform, so ably inaugurated by de la Huerta, was now undertaken by Obregón systematically and with a thoroughness that can hardly be termed Mexican.

The harassing problems with which he was called upon to deal seemingly fell into two categories: domestic and foreign. And it looked as though his main trouble in dealing with them

\* The correspondence which passed on this subject and the consequences of the repudiation are interesting and characteristic, but outside the scope of this work.

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would prove to be the financial blockade which the United States, France and Britain had been maintaining for some years, and which diverted from Mexico the normal inflow of capital from those countries.

But such an analysis of the situation would have been wholly erroneous. As a matter of fact, no issues were purely domestic or foreign. Every grievance and every projected reform had a twofold aspect, domestic and international. No internal reform of any moment could be undertaken without the sanction of the United States, nor could any written arrangement be come to with the State Department of the northern Republic without cutting very deeply into political and social life in Mexico.

And yet the internal embarrassments were of themselves portentous enough to dismay the stoutest optimist. An empty treasury, a hungry people, stricken with disease, superstitious, improvident, sluggish and discontented; predatory bands still prowling about the country seeking what they could devour; ambitious mosstroopers ready to head revolts and rebellions; thirty-two Sovereign States, jealous of their rights and frequently a prey to bitter feuds or anarchy; and a Federal Parliament, the members of which, when not wasting time in frothy declamation, were throwing hindrances in the way of useful legislation—those were some of the drags that obstructed the machinery of government. And some of these were the conscious or unconscious instruments of hostile elements abroad, whose one desire and striving was to induce or constrain the United States Government to dispatch troops into the country and “protect” it for all time.

The United States Government was itself ranged among the most formidable enemies of the Obregón administration. Whether that attitude be qualified or no with the saving clause “with the best intention” is of no moment. To Obregón it was a paralysing influence. Whithersoever he turned he found lets and hindrances that bore the hallmark of the Washington State Department.

Was it a matter of funds for the purpose of disbanding the army, or resuming the payment of interest on the national debt, or inaugurating a new system of education? The United States held the purse strings of its own capitalists and also of those of France and Britain in its hands. Was it a project of coloniza-

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tion that the President had under consideration ? The United States Government regarded with alarm the immigration of (eleven) Japanese to Mexico. Was the land question ripe for settlement ? It could not be dealt with until Washington should debate all the remedial provisions of the agrarian law and leave it a ridiculous torso. The labour problem was a veritable hornet's nest, for no solution of it could be devised which did not inspire the Washington statesmen with the fear that " bolshevist propensities " were gaining ground in governmental circles in Mexico. In fine, Obregón's hands were tied, and there was but one way of loosing them : he must agree to pinion those of Mexico and attach her permanently to the United States. His position seemed desperate.

By this time he had, as we saw, acquired a very extensive knowledge of his country and of the ills with which it was afflicted. He was also capable of prescribing efficacious remedies. But as we have also seen, it was impossible for him to apply them. The veto uttered in Washington in the highest interests of morality was calculated to have a most sinister and demoralizing effect on the nation for whose behoof it was ostensibly promulgated.

One of his first cares was to disband the greater part of the army, which was devouring the substance of the nation. The task was delicate and dangerous, owing to the depletion of the Treasury funds and to the large number of self-appointed generals eager for pensions and uniforms, and to the legions of greedy freebooters in their train. But by dint of tact and firmness the national forces were speedily reduced to about fifty thousand. Simultaneously with this military purge the President administered another to the army of civil servants, among whom were numerous parasites and incompetent officials.

The agrarian problem faced him from the outset. His views on the subject were already known, seeing that a few weeks before taking office he had appeared in the legislature and unfolded them to the deputies. He held that the chief cause of Mexico's agrarian troubles is her cultural backwardness. Whereas abroad, owing to the combination of labour, capital and intellect, agriculture had evolved rapidly and the products of the soil had been augmented and cheapened, the Mexican land-owners kept jogging on in the way of their remote ancestors and were therefore unable to compete with foreigners. The



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Yankee landed proprietor is able to send his agents to the centre of Mexico, there to hire a number of labourers, take them to the United States and back at his own expense, pay them two dollars and a half a day, and then export the produce of their labour to Mexico, where it is sold at a considerable profit. As the earnings of the workman in Mexico hardly sufficed to enable him to live, he naturally desired to obtain a strip of land for himself, which he could till with the certainty of receiving for himself the entire product of his labour. To this he has a right which the law should recognize.

But the ignorance of the masses and their aversion to new agricultural methods are a chronic obstacle to betterment, and education is the remedy. The people, however, must be fed before they can be educated and instructed. Empty stomachs are a hindrance to the assimilation of knowledge. Obregón's general conclusions from these reflections were that the enormous estates, which were only partly under cultivation or were tilled by primitive methods, should be parcelled out and given to those who are willing and able to cultivate them.

The Ministry of Public Education drafted a Bill making the cultivation of Indian corn, which is the staple food of the Mexican people,\* part of the instruction to be given in five thousand elementary schools, each of which will be endowed with a field for the purpose. Further, the President ordered certain reclaimed lands, which had formerly been the beds of lakes, to be distributed at low rents and on favourable terms to those who desire and are competent to till them.†

This praiseworthy endeavour to right the wrongs of the people, form a thriving and contented peasantry, and incidentally to achieve a number of social results of the highest value, encountered bitter criticism and provoked angry opposition within and beyond the Mexican frontiers. The grounds of this hostility were as numerous as the interests involved, and not all of these could be avowed. The sacredness of private property was the chief principle invoked, seeing that it had been adopted as a dogma in the United States and enjoyed

\* *El Democrata*, June 6th, 1922. The value of the Indian corn consumed in the Republic, and of its preparation, represents a sum of half a million dollars, U.S. currency, per day.

† *El Herald de Mexico*, June 10th, 1922.

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the protection accorded by the Washington State Department to everything North American. The Obregón Cabinet was violently assailed as a Bolshevist junta and its activities were denounced in advance as dangerous.

Those were the lines taken by the publicists of the opposition. The subterranean tactics of foreign politicians were complex, ingenious and unedifying. . . .

It may not be amiss to point out that various European Governments have done or are doing exactly what the Obregón administration attempted without having met with any such obstruction, so far as one knows.

The Roumanian Government, for instance, which had for years been perplexed with an agrarian problem more entangled than that of Mexico, solved it drastically by the very means which the President of that Republic has in view. Nearly half of the arable land in the Roumanian realm belonged to a limited class of great landowners.\* For years the various Governments had brought in so-called land reforms which had no abiding effect. During the war† a new departure was made by the Constituent Assembly in Jassy. That body passed a law establishing the right of the State to expropriate land, not only, as theretofore, on the ground of *public* utility, but also on the ground of *national* utility. It further resolved that peasant proprietorship should be at once extended at the expense of the great landed proprietors. This principle was essentially the same as that which had been inscribed in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, to which the United States Government offers persistent opposition.

The article of the existing Roumanian Constitution was accordingly modified by a clause decreeing the total expropriation of all so-called *latifundia*, of all land belonging to foreigners and absentees, to the Crown and others, and also of the property of private individuals up to a certain total. In the following year the principle laid down by the Assembly was applied by a Royal Decree‡ which provided for expropriation, and in no case allowing anyone to possess more than

\* Their number was only 5,385, or 0.64 of all the agriculturists in the kingdom. On the other hand, 95.40 per cent., *i.e.*, 920,939 husbandmen, owned less land than they.

† In 1917. .

‡ On December 16th, 1918.

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a maximum of five hundred hectares as private property. Every rood beyond that was to be expropriated. According to this scale the owner of one hundred hectares was allowed to retain his entire holding, whereas the proprietor of five hundred was permitted to keep only 241.9 hectares, and the man who possessed ten thousand hectares was deprived of nine thousand five hundred. By a subsequent law\* the maximum amount of land allowed to a single proprietor was reduced, but instead of being the same for the whole kingdom it was variable according to the provinces, and only by way of exception were five hundred hectares accorded to any one individual.

The expropriated lands were parcelled out among the peasants in lots varying in extent from one to five hectares, the latter being the maximum. The lands were assessed by departmental commissions presided over by judges, and from the decisions which they pronounced an appeal lay to the Supreme Court.†

That reform in its essential traits has already been executed.‡

The indemnity to former owners was to have been "just and paid in advance." As a matter of fact, it was neither. It is computed that the price at which the lands were assessed amounted hardly to one-fourth of their market value. None the less, the wealthy proprietors appear to have behaved uncommonly well, and to have borne the sacrifice demanded of them by the nation without grumbling.§

Roumania undertook to accomplish this far-ranging reform, which will have a lasting effect upon the well-being and tranquillity of the nation, in virtue of her sovereignty.

Lithuania, Czecho-Slovakia and other European countries have laid down the same principle of *national* utility, and being sovereign States have applied it freely to all residents in the country, foreigners as well as natives. Mexico's sovereign rights are acknowledged by the United States in words and

\* The law of July 17th, 1921.

† The price must not exceed forty times the amount of the rent fixed for the period 1917-1922. Payment was effected in ready money or in scrip bearing interest at the rate of 5 per cent.

‡ In the kingdom of Roumania 2,186,484 hectares have been expropriated, and nearly all have been distributed. In Bessarabia 1,208,101 hectares have been expropriated. In Transylvania the work has only been begun.

§ See *Le Temps* (Paris), June 30th, 1922.

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denied in deliberate, systematic acts. Thus Secretary Hughes says :

"Mexico is free to adopt any policy which she pleases with respect to her public lands, but she is not free to destroy without compensation valid titles which have been obtained by American citizens under Mexican laws."\*

She is peremptorily ordered to exempt all citizens of the northern Republic from these laws so that only Mexicans shall be affected by them. And she is further implicitly admonished that all those Mexicans who owned oil lands before 1917, but did not sell them then, should also be exempted from the law. In a word, the Mexican Constitution must be adjusted to the needs and desires of the six classes of North American residents : oilmen, miners, cattle-breeders, industrials, bankers and religious proselytizers. And the Mexican population, it is feelingly argued by the politicians of Washington, cannot be treated worse than foreigners, so that for it too the Constitution must be radically altered, otherwise the population would have just cause to revolt.

Even the United States Press, which does not appear ever to have fathomed the deep issues involved in this apparently local dispute, deplored both the form and the substance of Mr. Hughes' utterance. One influential newspaper wrote that Mexico "is addressed as an inferior, and peremptorily summoned to deposit adequate pledges for its future good conduct. . . . This amounts to putting pressure on Mexico to interpret in binding treaty form the provisions of the Constitution of 1917 in a way required of it, to secure recognition by the United States. Whether President Obregón has the power to do so is not taken into consideration.

"It might happen that Japan some day should turn to account in California the Hughes doctrine of the 'safeguarding of property rights against confiscation,' and the Hughes denial that Mexico 'is not free to destroy without compensation valid titles which have been obtained by American citizens under Mexican laws.' But of course Japanese rights on the Pacific are another question. Our Mexican policy smells strongly of oil. Indeed, no effort is made to conceal the odour."†

\* Very often for a ludicrously low price. See the *New York World*, June 9th, 1921.

† The *New York World*, June 9th, 1921.

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It is with such obstacles that Obregón's measures of internal reform have to contend.

The taproot of all these obstacles is the unavowed resolve of the United States Government to curtail the sovereignty of Mexico and exercise a protectorate there. That resolve is not confined to Mexico only. It extends to all Latin America, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. It is the outcome of a slow, elemental, all-crushing movement like that of a vast glacier. Obregón's attitude towards this systematic encroachment is one of the most remarkable innovations in the relations of State to State. It marks a noteworthy advance in the direction of the new system of international intercourse, to which the only alternative is capitalistic imperialism, followed after a more or less considerable interval by a sequence of tremendous revolutions.

That is the relevance of this apparent digression.

On a few less momentous issues Obregón refused point-blank to recognize Yankee claims, and reaped the gratitude of all normal men. Thus, one of his first acts as President was to put an end to the curse of gambling, which was widespread in the Republic, but was particularly demoralizing in certain frontier States. The local authorities protested against his radical prohibition and invoked the sovereignty of each federal State as their warrant for perpetuating the abuse.

Then a group of highly respectable American citizens\*—who would fain have formed the seventh class of Yankee interests in Mexico—sent a respectful letter to the President expressing their conscientious conviction that he was making a serious mistake in closing the casino of Tijuana,† which they regarded as a "veritable place of amusement."

To that letter the President's secretary replied that General Obregón "will not under any circumstances nor on any pretext permit the re-establishment of gambling in Lower California, nor the opening of houses of a like character in other parts of the country. Considering the sincerity which actuates you when you characterize the gambling resorts as veritable places of amusement, he takes the liberty to suggest that you should

\* Representing the Bankers' Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Merchants of San Diego and the Municipal Council of that city.

† A notorious haunt of the most undesirable set of people of both republics, where vast sums of money were being constantly lost in gambling.

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establish them in your own city, whereby, over and above the practical results for yourselves, you would avoid a considerable journey when setting out in quest of amusement."\*

Those honourable men were of that class of Americans who fancy that in virtue of their citizenship they are invested with the right to convert Mexican Christians into Yankee Christians and Mexican breadwinners into reckless gamblers. And if the maxim preached by Mr. Harding and acted upon by Mr. Hughes is tenable, this right is undoubtedly one of its corollaries.

The most serious aspect of the matter for Obregón and his Government is this: that the nations of Europe, owing to a variety of motives, are at one with the State Department of Washington, so that Mexico is up against an impassable barrier to domestic reform. She thus stands lower in the hierarchy of nations than Roumania and Lithuania. And what is more exasperating still, she is being implicitly despoiled of her sovereignty in the name of morality and the sacredness of property.

As a matter of fact the foreigner in Mexico has always been highly privileged. The Mexican people have on the whole respected his person and his property spontaneously. Many deplorable exceptions there certainly have been, but they only confirm the rule. Even the most bloodthirsty rebels and bandits were wont to treat the outlander as the nation's guest and thereby inviolable, although the outlander too often took sides against the Government of the Republic. European Governments, following the lead of Washington, have gradually established a mixed system of capitulations which differs only in form from that which still obtains in Turkey and China. In European and other countries, as we have seen, the foreigner has not yet become the sacrosanct object of awe which he is in the Mexican Republic, nor are his rights anything like so extensive. The Government of Jamaica recently laid a Bill before the Legislative Council in Kingston to disable aliens from holding lands in the island.† The French Chamber approved a law‡ whereby "no foreigner is permitted to exercise the professions of customs broker, transport agent, information bureau,

\* See Mexican papers of December 16th, 1920.

† In July, 1921.

‡ In the summer of 1921.

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immigration and emigration agent, director of employment bureau, proprietor of hotel, café or cabaret director, administrator or proprietor of a newspaper, unless express permission has been first obtained from the Government.”

But France, it is true, is a Sovereign State and can make her own laws without consulting any higher instance than her Chamber and Executive.

The United States Government demands from Mexico legislation and protection for aliens there which itself is unwilling or unable to accord to Mexicans or other aliens on its own territory. Against lynching and mob action there is no legal remedy in that land of liberty.\* And as to property rights, the Japanese have picked up ideas on the subject which are calculated to modify their conceptions of justice and equity.

\* In November, 1922, President Obregón called the attention of the United States Government to the murder of quite a number of harmless Mexicans.

## CHAPTER XX

### MAKING HEADWAY

LACK of cohesion, or say rather of cohesiveness, may be termed the original sin of the natives of Mexico. Its disastrous consequences are embodied in some of the saddest chapters of their tragic history. The primary causes, which, as has been pointed out, emanate partly from geographical conditions, have since the adoption of federation as a system of government been accentuated by political arrangements which arbitrarily split up the people into a number of sovereign quasi-independent and spendthrift States. And the confusion and strife engendered by this inept regime constitute one of the greatest stumbling-blocks to the success of Obregón's reforms. No federal Government as yet has respected this atomization of the nation's energies and lived.

It may seem a political heresy to inveigh against the federal principle in a republic like Mexico, which has the encouraging example of the United States to stimulate it. But the fact is indisputable that between the populations of the two countries there is no parity and that what is good for one is baleful to the other. It is a striking illustration of the truth of the old saying that when two agents set about doing the same thing, it is not the same thing: "*quando duo faciunt idem, non est idem.*" The peoples of Mexico, as we have seen, are politically backward. They have neither experience nor visible aptitudes for direct participation in power, nor is it to be expected that a short probationary period will endow them with either. The essence of the problem is time and education. A sudden plunge into the political marsh cannot but be ruinous to all concerned. And the idea of bestowing sovereign rights upon a handful of unsophisticated men whose real interests are purely and painfully personal and economic and many of whom are homeless,



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resourceless and embittered, is bound to operate as a powerful dissolvent. Facts are there to bear out this assertion.

According to the present charter of the Mexican union, each of the federal entities is a sovereign State with its own Parliament, elective Governor, State Secretary and the usual host of officials who plot and counterplot against each other, absorb the substance of the people and not only give nothing positive in return, but very often open the sluice gates for the revolutionary flood to sweep away the produce of labour and thrift. Two of these sovereign States have an insignificant population of 78,000 and 85,000 respectively,\* and four of them less than 200,000.†

The laws made by those legislative assemblies are sometimes amazingly incongruous and run counter to those which have been enacted by the federal Chambers for the entire Republic. In one State, for example, the labour laws differ in a noteworthy degree from those which are in force in another State, here favouring the working man, there the employer, so that the Mexican cannot count on finding the same treatment in every part of his native land. The marriage statutes also vary from State to State, producing confusion, disappointment and finally contempt for all law.

This atomic arrangement and the superfluous institutions which it has called into being absorb much of the wealth created by the people and give nothing in return. The origin or the perpetuation of most of them was a desire to provide lucrative offices for political confederates and friends. Take, for example, the institution of the so-called "civic judges." These are employees whose function is to legalize marriages and contracts, register births and deaths, etc. Most of the fees go to the "judges" themselves and bring in as much as a thousand pesos a month each, yet their work belongs of right to the municipalities and their appointment is but a reward for political services. There are from 10,000 to 12,000 "civic judges" in the Republic, all of them superfluous, and they swallow up a considerable part of the tax-payer's earnings.

The law of the revenue stamp is another instance of institutions being created or maintained for improper political

\* Colima and Campeche.

† Aguascalientes, Morelos, Tabasco and Nayarit.

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purposes. One example of how it works will suffice. If a merchant neglect to place the revenue stamp on his cigarettes or his wine, he is punishable with a fine of from five to five hundred pesos. The corrupt official who has friends among unscrupulous merchants will for a consideration allow these systematically to go on infringing the law, and then from time to time will fine them ten or fifteen pesos. In this way the law is brought into contempt. The statute which engenders or fosters these dishonest practices, together with many other of the same class, is now receiving the attention of the President with a view to its abolition.

The pretensions of the provincial law-givers scorn all bounds. The very first claim put forward by their official spokesmen had for its object the vetoing of the President's order closing gambling hells and dens of vice. "Our democratic Constitution," they argued, "makes each State sovereign within its own boundaries, and neither the President nor any federal body is warranted to intermeddle in its internal affairs." To this the President replied :

"In my conception, the sovereignty of the States is a moral tie which binds them to each other so as to form the Mexican Federation. I further hold that local sovereignty is not, and cannot fairly be deemed to be, violated when the object of the bill in question is to put an end to an evil that prevails throughout the country and is working havoc among the entire population. It is unthinkable that the Constitution should bestow upon the States power to foster immorality.'"

Each State of the Union has its parties, if one may dignify with that name adventurers, among many of whom principles and ideas have no currency, can have none. Electioneering manœuvres, deftly adapted to shifting conditions, are of all kinds from intimidation and forgery to maiming and killing, and from free fights in the public squares, churches and private houses to pitched battles and their accompaniments of incendiarism and plunder. And even after the fires have burnt out and the smoke has lifted, the issue at stake still remains undecided as before, and two, sometimes even three, rival legislatures and governors continue to occupy public edifices and issue contradictory behests to the terrorized population.

\* *El Universal*, January 22nd, 1921. The President's opponents rely for their contention upon Articles 75 and 124 of the Constitution.

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The federate system which was devised by sentiment must be altered by reason. As it stands to-day, it is an obstacle to the process of social growth. Many of the proletarian sharers of power are not qualified to exercise the rights prematurely conferred on them. The assumption that politics and sociology are simple subjects which any man, in virtue of his birth and in spite of his ignorance, is competent and warranted to deal with, is one of the many modern heresies which retard the advancement of mankind. If there be any truth in the doctrine of evolution, it is that political and cultural progress is accomplished, not by leaps and bounds, but only very gradually and by the successful efforts of each generation to enhance and refine upon the inheritance bequeathed by its forbears. Parliamentarianism in Spain, for instance, is a dismal failure. In few Latin countries is it a success. Unlike some European States before the world war, which were less concerned to bestow liberty on the people than to admit them to participation of power, the Mexican Constitution purposes doing both and in effect achieves neither end.

Competition for power and office in those sovereign realms—several of which are bankrupt—frequently degenerates into downright lawlessness and now and again into primeval brutality. The consequences to the Republic, which is kept sempiternally simmering in civil strife, bid fair in the actual posture of international affairs to prove fatal. It is the same malignant political disease which gnawed the vitals of Poland at the close of the eighteenth century and brought about the partition and downfall of that ill-fated monarchy. It would be difficult to exaggerate the perils to the Mexican Republic with which this fostering of confusion and anarchy is fraught. The current annals of the States of Yucatan, Campeche, Tabasco, Michoacan, Puebla, Veracruz and Tamaulipas are calculated to supply the President of the Republic with food for serious reflection on this evil.

To my thinking there is but one efficacious remedy: the complete abolition of State sovereignty and the bestowal of some of its principal and important functions upon purged municipalities. I feel tempted to go further and say that either this drastic cure will be tried, and tried in the near future, or else Mexico, like the Poland of Stanislas Poniatowski, will inevitably go to pieces. This, however, is but the judgment of a

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friendly outsider, the main recommendation of which is its disinterestedness.

To simplify, cheapen and renovate the machinery of government and incidentally to compact the disparate elements of the population into a conscious community is, under present conditions, a tremendous task. And yet, in making a survey of the situation one cannot but regard it as a condition preliminary and indispensable to root-reaching reform. Invested interests in the separate States naturally quail before any exhortation to make the sacrifices involved. And a crusade with this reform for its object would exhaust energies that might be more profitably employed in other ways.

In estimating the distractions and difficulties with which Obregón had to cope at the outset, one would do well to bear in mind the circumstance that every element of discontent in the Republic was carefully held in leash by the powerful bodies in Washington and New York who were working for intervention. Disappointed politicians of local Mexican parliaments, defeated candidates for governorships, neglected generals, aspirants to the presidency of the Republic, needy newspaper men and brigands fallen on evil days were all at the beck of those wealthy corporations, which grudged neither money nor labour in the service of Mexico and considered that the most valuable service which they could render to that country and themselves would be to have its administration placed in the hands of enterprising North Americans appointed by the State Department in Washington. Everything therefore that was done or omitted by the federal and the State authorities in the Republic offered vantage ground to these financial potentates, who labelled themselves "Friends of Mexico."

What Obregón has accomplished in the face of this omnipresent opposition and in a brief span of time is truly remarkable. And he achieved this by a course of action which was at once original, simple and efficacious. For addressing himself from the outset to positive tasks, he eschewed every kind of aggression. "Whatever tactics other States may pursue," he is wont to say, "ours are enjoined by circumstance: the discharge of our duties at home and abroad without heeding criticism or attacks and without provoking just resentment."

One of his first moves had for its object the proper administration of justice. The tribunals and their procedure had long

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been a byword of reproach in Mexico. The Supreme Court left lawsuits affecting the Constitution, the rights of oil companies and Mexico's relations with the United States for years without a decision. During the twelvemonth ending in the year 1918, 1,542 cases were laid before that tribunal and only 828 dealt with. "The Supreme Court," writes an eminent public man, himself a deputy and publicist,\* "is the first that . . . makes a mockery of justice in Mexico." To administer an efficacious purge to this and the ordinary tribunals exercised Obregón's ingenuity to the utmost. But he has admittedly made perceptible headway, and the cases involving international problems have already been disposed of satisfactorily.

If Mexico requires foreign capital, her need of foreign blood is more pressing still. Example and emulation combined with instruction are the methods which the President deems best adapted to give a fillip to agriculture. And from the day on which he took office—nay, months before—he set to work on a comprehensive scheme for internal and foreign colonization, which has already secured encouraging results. Large maps of the suitable districts are being drawn and printed, lots are being surveyed and demarcated, concessions have been made to a number of companies conferring on them an interest in the land which they put in order for colonists, and thousands of colonists have already adopted Mexico as their new fatherland.

The representatives of the Republic abroad have received circulars embodying the facilities and inducements offered by the Mexican Government to intending immigrants, and these inducements are considerably greater than those given by the Argentine Republic, which has hitherto been regarded as the State most generous to foreign settlers.†

Over twenty thousand Mennonites, who had been colonists first in Russia and subsequently in Canada, have sold all their possessions in the latter country and emigrated to Mexico. Mr. Rothenberg, of Chicago, received a communication from President Obregón, respecting Jewish emigrants, to whom great facilities and a cordial welcome have been accorded, besides which, "a fertile region capable of maintaining a million human beings" will be assigned to them. The Germans,

\* Vito Alessio Robles. See *El Demócrata*, June 3rd, 1922.

† These facilities have been published by the Press of various countries. See *Universal*, May 26th, 1922.

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who, no longer in a condition to export wares, are constrained to export men and women, have communicated with Obregón on the prospects in Mexico, informing him that a grandiose project of emigration to that country was under consideration. By way of a commencement, five thousand families are about to leave Germany for the State of Chihuahua, where five hundred thousand acres of land are ready for colonists. Three thousand other German families have received allotments in the fruitful State of Chiapas.\*

The extension of existing railway lines, surveys for new ones, the dredging of rivers, the creation of a new line of steamers on the Pacific between Mexican and North American ports, the construction of great international high roads for motors, the building of two international bridges, the protection of woods and forests and the afforestation of extensive districts in various parts of the Republic—are among Obregón's "minor undertakings" during the first two years of his office. One of the railway lines shortly to be completed will connect San-Marcos in Jalisco with Tepic, and join the Mexican capital with California. Another interesting innovation is the installation of wireless telegraphy on all Mexican trains. A railway projected between Topolimbampo and Chihuahua City will give another transcontinental system to the Republic. Between El Paso, in Texas, and the capital of the Republic a broad motor road, 1,800 miles long, is also contemplated, and has been discussed and reported on by competent engineers.

How rapidly things are mending under the enterprising and reforming hand of President Obregón may be inferred from the circumstance that insurance companies, which practically did no business during the revolution, have been active since 1920, and are augmenting the number and importance of their operations every month.†

From the day on which he was sworn in as President, and indeed some months before, Obregón had frequently stated that his Government would recognize the nation's debts and pay compensation for losses sustained by foreigners during the civil war. And in pursuance of that policy he invited the

\* *Berliner Tageblatt*, May, 1922, also *Excelsior* (of Mexico), May 22nd, 1922.

† Already in 1920 fire insurances were effected for 667,567,386 Mexican dollars, and in the year 1921 for 814,328,207 Mexican dollars. Other operations, excepting marine insurances, have increased in like proportion

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foreign creditors of the nation to send representatives to Mexico City for the purpose of fixing the amount of its indebtedness and coming to an agreement respecting the resumption of payments. But he received no response, because the State Department in Washington was in the sulks. In the meanwhile he was continually reproached by the Press of the United States for not redeeming his promise.

No sooner was this subject publicly touched upon than a few voices in Mexico were heard demanding that the recognition of the national debt be joined and discussed together with the question of recognition. But the President scouted the suggestion.

“The extent,” he said, “to which moral obligation is recognized in a community is the true measure of its capacity for progress. Our commitments must be fairly met. We cannot make the discharge of our duty the subject of barter. To pay our debts is our problem, and we must solve it. To recognize our Government is the duty of other States, and it is for them to discharge it if they are so minded.”

It was not until the summer of 1922 that these issues were satisfactorily settled between the delegates of the international bankers on the one hand and the Mexican Minister of Finances, Adolfo de la Huerta, on the other.\* The upshot of the conversations then held in New York was an undertaking to recognize Mexico's indebtedness at the figure there determined, to resume cash payments on account of interest in the year 1923, to return the railroads to private management, to found a new federal bank of issue. Besides these important achievements of de la Huerta and Obregón, various troublesome matters in dispute between American oil companies and the Mexican Government were arranged to the satisfaction of both parties.

One of the most resonant and popular of Obregón's legislative undertakings was directed to the permanent betterment of the working man's lot. The framers of the Constitution of 1917 had taken the matter in hand, but had merely promulgated a general principle. For the various States of the Union different statutes existed, so that the workman was privileged in one State and the employer in another, while the rights of the former were always theoretical and depended

\* The agreement was signed in New York on June 17th, 1922.

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for their realization upon the wearisome procedure of the law courts. Obregón, after a thorough study, not of social theories or foreign labour laws, but of the requirements of the working man in Mexico, elaborated a remarkable Bill which evoked far resonant applause in the Republic and in other Latin-American countries.\* A few of the preambles are worth reproducing here as indications of the lines on which his mind habitually moves.

“Considering that in the life of latter-day peoples the true function of the State is to seek such a social equipoise as will ward off indigence from those classes which, lacking a competency, are wholly dependent for their livelihood upon their personal exertions ;

“Considering that every workman, to whatsoever category, age or sex he may belong, who puts forth personal exertions—intellectual or material—for the behoof of private wealth, from which public wealth derives, ought to be regarded as a factor of the nation’s prosperity and greatness, compelling the gratitude of the State and its solicitude for his well-being ;

“Considering that most of the mishaps which befall the working classes arise, not from the want of laws, but from the difficulties in the way of applying them ; that these difficulties transform legal into mere theoretical rights, inasmuch as the workman himself has to confront the task of securing their realization, and that this is the outcome of involved, slow and costly legislation. . . .

“Considering that in recent times many lawgivers have taken as the basis of their legislation their own political ambitions, and have carried reforms which in their theoretico-legal aspect flatter the bulk of the labouring classes, but viewed in the light of the complications involved in their application, likewise please the capitalist classes because of the ease with which they may be evaded. . . .”

The essence of the law is this : The share in the profits which the workman is now demanding everywhere will take the form of a tax of ten per cent. of the salary or wages which he receives for his labour, and will be held by the State in trust, to be employed in payment of compensation for accidents, pensions and life insurances. After an activity of thirty years a workman can demand a pension, which the State is bound to accord, at the rate of forty per cent. of his average

\* In May, 1922.



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wages during that period. After forty years he is entitled to fifty-five per cent., and after fifty years to seventy per cent. The near relatives of workmen killed or disabled are also provided for in a like liberal spirit. Natural children are treated as legitimate when there is no legitimate offspring.

One of Obregón's favourite dicta is that the intellectual and moral capacities of the Mexican people have lain as dormant in modern times as lay the natural riches of their country in antiquity, and that the Open Sesame to utilization lies in breaking the spell of prejudice and superstition which keep the national soul benumbed. And this is the task of the educator. It is superlatively arduous. The initial difficulty is to gain the confidence of the native, especially the Indian, who invariably suspects the motives and stubbornly withstands the innovations of the educated classes. And to displace this barrier is well-nigh impossible. For, as the Indian hardly ever reads books and seldom reads newspapers, he cannot be reached through these. The key of his soul is frequently in the hands of the priests, through whom alone access may be had. And Obregón has not yet done enough to make friends of the lower clergy.

None the less, practically everything that experience, forethought and zeal for the public weal could suggest was undertaken by the President. He began by choosing for his fellow-worker the Rector of the University, a man whose ardour for the new birth of the nation was a passion. Dr. Vasconcelos has the temperament of an apostle, his capacity for self-abnegation and hard work is unprecedented, his perseverance unflagging and his resourcefulness almost unbounded. His defects are but the overstrainings of these admirable qualities. His intellect, dwelling by choice in the region of theory, clings tenaciously to abstract principles and ideas, takes insufficient thought of the limitations of those for whose behoof he is working and of the need of cultural aids, and ends by forfeiting somewhat of its elasticity and missing the full measure of attainable success.

Vasconcelos conceived a comprehensive scheme which must necessarily produce the desired results, if only the population were conscious of its own requirements and seconded his exertions. But a large section of the people took the opposite course.

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Obregón, attributing much greater significance to education than to any other department of government, created a special ministry for the work, and entrusted it to Dr. Vasconcelos. This alone was a stride forward. But no vast reforms are feasible without financial resources. And the United States Government keeps the President and his Administration deprived of these.

By way of contributing to fill this gap, Obregón turned all the funds which he had economized by disbanding the greater part of the army and other savings as well into the Ministry of Education, so that, instead of the six million pesos allotted by President Diaz when Mexico's financial credit stood higher than at any other period of her history, Obregón set apart for the purpose sixty million pesos a year, whereat the international bankers assembled in New York are said to have winced and expostulated.

Illiteracy was the Government's first objective, and a series of systematic attacks were directed against that. As it seemed least invincible in the army, schools were formed in all barracks throughout the country. Circulars were dispatched to the commanding officers of each district, ordering them to appoint capable officers and others to instruct the soldiers in reading, writing and arithmetic. Inspectors are periodically dispatched to see that these injunctions are carried out and to report on the results.

In the cities and towns twenty thousand schoolmasters were enlisted in this apostolate. Their functions were to travel over the Republic, establish schools in country manors, farmers' dwellings and ranches, convoke the inhabitants, children and adults, and impart to them elementary instruction. As the two grave impediments consisted in the passive resistance of the natives, which springs from rooted distrust, and in the numerous Indian dialects, of which the average schoolmaster is ignorant, another team of propagandists was got together, whose duty it was to move about the Republic, halting at the places in which the schools were to be opened, and to prepare the people for the coming of the educators by explaining the advantages of instruction and combating prejudice and suspicion.

During their first circuit these forerunners met with scant success. But the paucity of results was not construed as

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failure by the President or his Minister. On the contrary, it goaded them to redoubled efforts.

Schools were opened everywhere, and when there were not houses enough to accommodate the scholars—as was the case in the capital—instruction was imparted under the shadow of secular cypresses in the stately park of Chapultepec while transportable wooden houses were being constructed for their use. In the public gardens and squares, where students and scholars are wont to spend their leisure hours between lectures, libraries containing the textbooks which they are most likely to need have been opened at the cost of the Government on strips of land allotted by the Town Council. All the municipalities of the State of Mexico have received large consignments of books and reviews from the Federal Government for local libraries adapted to the needs of the population. Every place in the Republic which contains over three thousand inhabitants is to receive such libraries. The books exist in two copies, and are lent out to the people, who can take them to their homes. A cheap, well-printed edition of the best works of the literature of the world is being printed, published and distributed among the population of the country by the Ministry of Public Instruction.

Special educational establishments are also being provided for the various Indian tribes. Rural schools are being opened for the peasants, who are being taught the rudiments of agriculture, with model fields for practical demonstration and the promise of foreign colonists, as neighbours, for example and emulation. Every State in the Union will have at least one technical high school. In each mining district there will be a mining institute with a museum, an assaying laboratory and a library. Three great federal universities are to be endowed in the Republic.

The Minister Vasconcelos founded an interesting monthly review, containing useful articles composed in simple language on all manner of topics likely to prove helpful to masters and pupils. This well-edited periodical\* has for its main object, besides instruction, the training of public opinion and sentiment in the humanitarian principles to which Obregón and his fellow workers look for the regeneration of their country.

Perhaps the most significant of the measures adopted by

\* *El Maestro*. Revista de Cultura Nacional.

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the President is to be found in the Educational Bill which he drafted, and which proclaims that education in all the establishments dependent upon the Ministry is gratuitous, and that elementary education is obligatory. Furthermore, "so far as the resources of the Treasury permit, the Government will discharge the duty of feeding, clothing and educating all the children of the Republic under fourteen years of age who are orphans or notoriously poor and dependent on parents incapacitated for work."

Here one involuntarily calls to mind Obregón's own bitter experiences as a poor scholar, doing household work, making articles of furniture, toiling early and late to eke out a livelihood, and yet without the wherewithal to buy a hat.

Another noteworthy trait in this vast educational movement is the daring and just iconoclasm advocated by the President and practised by his intrepid Minister in the sacred shrine of national history. Obregón holds that the histories which teach children to venerate military heroes (except the few who confined themselves to the legitimate defence of their country), to exalt their own people above others, to applaud crimes as virtues because perpetrated for the supposed benefit of the nation, contain the most virulent poison that could be poured into the veins of a national organism. It is in some sort a spiritual *curare*, and its source must be destroyed.

In truth it is no easy task to find good educators anywhere to-day, and in Mexico it is superlatively difficult. The successful pedagogue is a man with a veritable vocation. He must not belong to the theoretical type which supplies scholars and thinkers. He must have a predilection for the work of moral and intellectual training, a fine feeling for the manifold and growing needs of the expanding soul as well as ingenuity in satisfying them; he must be susceptible of enthusiasm and capable of communicating it, and his ardour should be rooted in deep moral and social feeling. The combination of these qualities is exceedingly rare.

Nor should it be forgotten that education and instruction ought to go hand in hand, whereas in Mexico, owing largely to the force of circumstances, they are separated, and too often the former is wholly absent, with the result that moral responsibility is weakened or atrophied. Moreover, the abiding effects of education on a variety of races cannot be expected in a

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decade or a generation. It will take very much longer to dam the streams of impulse and modify the moral sensibilities and the many occult affinities stored up in the race, which are inherited by individuals, whom they differentiate from the members of other branches of the human family. It is instructive to note how these currents, which carry the physico-moral being in a certain direction, suddenly declare themselves with unforeseen energy in an environment which presents nothing akin to them.

## CHAPTER XXI

### GOLD IN LIEU OF WAR

O BREGÓN'S efficacious methods of dealing with the backwardness of the population, the unruliness of ambitious politicians, the feuds between labour and capital, and the trammels of an unsuitable Constitution made a profound impression on the nation. Many of his former opponents declared themselves his partisans. In the United States fair-minded men applauded his principles and the Press paid tributes to his sincerity. Speedily the idea began to take root that, after all, Mexico has nothing to fear from her powerful and whimsical neighbour, provided that she settles down to normal existence and discharges her international duties. This belief was strengthened by the serenity and self-confidence of the President, who, it was assumed, in shaping the destinies of his country congruously with its highest interests, would be unhindered by its secular enemies, who have been the professional politicians, not the people, of the United States.

That view is erroneous. Do what she may, Mexico is actually passing through the crisis of her fate. And friendly onlookers are dubious of her chances of emerging from the ordeal unscathed. What strikes them most forcibly is the enormous power possessed by the Yankee combination of financial and industrial magnates, of intriguing and chauvinistic politicians and of a subservient and influential Press. These elements, before which even the greatest nations of the world are now quailing and cringing, will go on ignoring the reforms already accomplished in Mexico by President Obregón and his fellow workers and making ropes to draw the Republic within the orbit of the world's "greatest democracy." It is neither easy to shake that conclusion nor difficult to show that the energies arrayed against Mexico are more formidable than

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is assumed. What Obregón and the knot of intrepid pioneers around him have to fear is not merely a plot, nor a sequence of plots, nor even a revolution paid for in advance by wealthy Yankees, but a vast system, heartless, soulless and hydra-headed, operating with elemental force like that of a moving glacier, which only a greater elemental force can arrest. Imperialism is one of its many names.

The phenomenon is not local. It is neither Mexican, Caribbean nor Latin-American. It is conterminous with the planet. Neither is its scope financial, economic or political only. It includes every facet of human interest except the ethical, and in lieu of this it offers canting phrases. It is concerned mainly with the creation and accumulation of wealth throughout the globe, and with the employment of that wealth as a means of dominating the world. Among its aids are schools, churches, societies, clubs, industries, shops, picture-palaces, advertisements, newspapers and tourists. In its programme are incorporated the velleities of the Russian Tsardom and the aims of the German Kaiser. Its patriotism is narrower, more intolerant and aggressive than that of the Junkers of pre-war days. Its thirst of gold and domination is quenchless, its treaties are Nessus' shirts to its co-signatories and scraps of paper to its own authorities—in a word, its necessities know no law.

In another of its aspects the system is the effect of a fell disease—one of the diseases of which vast political organisms die. It is the malady which weakened the Tsardom and ruined the Russian people. It is the same disorder that impelled Germany along a road which led to her defeat and dismemberment. Among its symptoms are greed of gold, lust of power and a mania of greatness which, dissatisfied with the trophies of earth, scours the very heavens in search of divine honours and privileges and the nether regions in quest of tools and tactics. In its most acute form it makes the Deity its sleeping partner, interprets His will to mankind, and claims to lead the human race to its foredestined goal.

It is by means of this odd compound of omnivorous greed and Puritanical principles, of the liturgy of the golden calf and the dogmas of a new theocracy that the politicians and financiers of the United States propose to allay the fever that is now wasting the human race, and to achieve the unity of

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mankind by an imperialism more comprehensive than that of Rome under the Cæsars and the Popes, unquickenened by a vitalizing idea, unredeemed by a human sentiment.

The one element of novelty in this new and powerful endeavour to mechanize human relations and materialize human ends is the repression—not as yet the abolition—of military violence in carrying out the unification of the race. Financial and economic levers are to supersede artillery and poison gases, and when war is absolutely unavoidable recourse will be had to the dictionary of new diplomacy and it will receive another and less repellent name. Typical specimens of how the process will be initiated and accomplished may be studied to-day in all their details in Mexico, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Nicaragua, Colombia, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Liberia, Samoa, Mesopotamia and Peru.

Reliance upon the promised bloodless attainment of peace and “normalcy” is the trump card of financial imperialism. With that before his eyes President Harding felt warranted in holding up the blessed example of the United States to the restive dwellers in other lands, and telling them that if all nations were like unto his people there would be no more wars in this vale of tears and blood.

The bloodless character of the operations by which races and nations, tongues and tribes, are to be compelled to come into the house of the world's overlord is calculated to impress the war-weary. And yet it stands at most for a change of form. Thousands of Austrians and Germans—children, women and old men—who perished of hunger and cold since the Armistice, were victims of the new method and substitutes for the soldiers who fall in battle. Against them no guns were levelled, no swords unsheathed. Yet they dropped as grass before the scythe of the mower.

The objective of the Transatlantic reconstructors, then, is not merely the reduction of this or that republic to a state of dependency on Washington; it is the embodiment of a wholly new idea, the execution of a grandiose scheme for the formation of a new State system, with a hierarchical ordering of nations, peoples and races, divided and subdivided into classes, the whole subordinated to the chosen people of the new era.

That, in brief, is the cardinal fact which governs the world situation to-day.



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As yet it has encountered no serious opposition anywhere. In Europe the Governments are so harassed by their own particular troubles and so engrossed by their temporary strivings that they have neither the leisure nor the desire to look ahead. Eager to make friends and allies, they vie with each other in obsequiousness to the officials of the Washington State Department. Germany besought their intervention in the matter of reparations. France, in the person of M. Poincaré, exalted their horn when differentiating France's debts to the United States from her liabilities to Britain. Russia is not unsuccessfully striving to placate Yankee Puritanism by lucrative concessions. In Asia the Japanese are pensive and passive, while preparations are being made to discharge them from the work of uplifting the Chinese.

But if there is no resistance or protest anywhere, there is at least a concrete alternative in the guise of a noble example offered by a knot of Mexican men, who appreciate the higher possibilities of the race, and to-day represent the greatest and most fertilizing current of humanity. Their enterprise is neither a theory, nor an opinion, but an honest effort to get the moral law acknowledged as the authoritative guide for governments and peoples. In their modes of action there is no room for aggression, inasmuch as two wrong actions do not make one right. They respect dissentients and leave adversaries to their own devices. They proclaim that nations and individuals who are thrall to their passions, live for themselves and take no thought of their neighbours, are thwarting the work of reconstruction, and may end by making it sheer impossible. Whatever feats the wielders of superior brute force may achieve, they at least will keep within the bounds which they set themselves, content with preaching their ideas by example. Thus, although unassisted by propaganda, their movement is missionary.

Onlookers who are really interested in the destinies of humanity and long to see some approach made to its regeneration, can discern for themselves the character and tendencies of each of these currents.

If the substitution of the power of gold for the force of arms is not a new discovery, it has never before been employed on the same gigantic scale as to-day. The Government of the United States, from the beginning of its campaign of

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territorial extension in the forties of last century down to a relatively recent date, satisfied its predatory instincts in the traditional way by fraud, constraint and violence. It should not, however, be overlooked that even at that date, when wresting by brute force and without rhyme or reason fertile territory from its weak and wealthy neighbours, it never omitted to pay the usual Christian tribute to morality by shifting the blame on its victims, nor failed to utter the usual act of grace after temporary satiety. These rites have since become essential parts of the system.

An example will convey a notion of the procedure, and incidentally tend to explain the scepticism of the Mexican in presence of the Yankee friends of his country.

Down to the year 1845 Texas was an integral part of Mexico. The boundaries between the two Republics had been carefully fixed and solemnly agreed to by both. Desirous of benefiting by the example of industrious Americans, the Mexican authorities generously bestowed a large land concession upon a pushing Yankee from Missouri,\* who brought in his fellow countrymen and formed large colonies there. This was an act of friendship which called for a handsome return. And the opportunity to make it was exceptionally inviting.

The Mexicans sorely needed help in establishing their republic on a firm footing, and help was yearned for and expected. But the Yankee colonists, reinforced by more immigrants and filibusters, seceded from the Federation, declared their independence, and were received into the North American Union. The solemn pact settling the frontiers of the two republics went for nothing.

That unfriendly act caused a rupture. The fortune of arms naturally favoured the Yankees, who, having defeated Mexican armies and laid waste Mexican cities, refused to make peace unless their neighbours ceded to them the States of California and New Mexico. No historian has as yet attempted to justify or excuse these odious acts. Even the House of Representatives, which President Polk had not consulted before resorting to hostilities, censured his behaviour. But the annexed territory was not returned. The politicians of to-day differ nowise in their tactics from President Polk, who sighed for

\* Moses Austin by name.

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peace in public while privately giving orders to wage a war of devastation against an unoffending neighbour in dire straits. The falsehood was industriously spread that Mexico had begun the campaign, and indignation was aroused against her. And when the scandalous peace was signed, he publicly prided himself on the rare magnanimity exhibited to that republic by the United States.

Ever since then the wirepullers of Washington have maintained this procedure intact. The financial and political troubles of their neighbours are their harvest time. Tenders of brotherly help are then poured in upon the Government of the distracted republic, and when not thankfully accepted, are generally imposed. And Yankee help to Latin-American States is as the kiss of the vulture to the chicken and as the hug of the bear to the child.

One of the most flagrant examples of this griping extortion was given in the year 1859, when the noblest figure in Latin-American history, Benito Juarez, occupied the Mexican stage. At that moment Juarez, at the head of the Liberal forces of the country, was engaged in a life and death struggle with the Conservatives, and the issue was still uncertain. He rightly reasoned that if he and his administration were recognized by the United States, this act of moral sympathy would go far to raise the spirits and fan the enthusiasm of his soldiers, while it would cost nothing to the Washington State Department. Juarez was also in sore need of funds, and was ready to contract a loan on conditions very advantageous to the Yankee financiers. In short, here was one of the many occasions on which the altruistic statesmen of the world's greatest democracy could show the spirit that actuated them. And they showed it.

They pressed and bullied this noble-minded man into purchasing official recognition and a paltry advance of four million dollars with acceptance of a treaty which spelled irretrievable ruin to his country. By this treaty the United States Government secured perpetual and unrestricted transit across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and also across the northern States of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, exemption for American citizens from all levies and loans, and the right to employ troops to enforce the terms of this infamous compact. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was mild and considerate as compared to

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this, yet the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was the outcome of a bloody war.

Those terms, when they became known, caused a tremendous stir in Europe as well as in America. The Governments of France, Britain and Spain rightly construed this act of rapacity as a virtual transfer of the Mexican Republic to the United States,\* and considered how the situation which it would create had best be met. So loud was the outcry and so sharp the strictures that the treaty, instead of being ratified, was consigned to the limbo of things that might have been, as a specimen of Yankee friendship and Yankee help.

When Mexicans are now accused of receiving the offers of Washington politicians and New York financiers with irrational distrust, the average reader, like the impartial historian, may find the word "irrational" misplaced. And when President Obregón is asked by the Washington State Department to-day to sign a treaty of amity and commerce which lies ready drafted in Washington, in return for recognition, his countrymen may well be excused if they recall to mind the circumstance that it was in return for recognition that Juarez was constrained to sign the ignominious covenant just alluded to.

Before the world war, which brought the work of disseminating calumnies of the most infamous kind to the highest perfection of which it is capable, probably no nation had suffered so terribly from systematic poisoning of the wells of truth as Mexico. The Press of the United States is practically the only source of information about Latin America generally, and about Mexico in particular, of which Britain, France, Central and Eastern Europe dispose. What the principal newspapers of New York, Washington and Chicago, therefore, tell the world about those countries is accepted on trust and without criticism. And the mischievous untruths which in this manner are interwoven with the tissue of current history constitute a damning exposure of the depravity of some of the framers of public opinion in that progressive country.

From the epoch of President Polk, who, to justify his war of devastation and conquest, misled the legislature and people of the United States by falsely asserting that Mexico had precipitated hostilities, down to the days of President Harding, a section, and unhappily neither the smallest nor least

\* See H. H. Bancroft, "History of Mexico," p. 464 (New York, 1914).

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influential, of the Press of the United States has lent itself to the spread of the most wicked lies about Mexico that a rancorous mind could conceive or a slanderous pen could formulate. Whenever and wherever falsehood could most damage the Mexican Government or country, it was invented, embroidered and given to the world. The dishonesty underlying many of the circumstantial reports about President Obregón, for example, has seldom been surpassed, though it may have been equalled during the great war. Every move he made, every step he took, was deemed a fitting occasion for the launching of some damaging fabrication.

“Obregón Losing Hold” is the title of an article in the *Washington Post*,\* which opens thus: “Latest reports reaching heret† from Mexico, *based on first-hand investigation*, state that President Obregón is losing his grip, and that conditions in the country remain hopeless, *with no single sign pointing towards improvement or remedy*. The foreign diplomats in Mexico City estimate that there will be a new Government within ninety days, or six months at the outside. According to these reports, *Obregón, it is added, fully realizes that he is powerless to bring back the restoration of the country.*”‡

Those words were penned in March, 1921, and published in a widely circulating newspaper. The ninety days have come and gone several times since then, and the alleged forecast of the diplomatists, with their first-hand investigations, have not come to pass. It is psychologically amusing to see the statement given to a reading public with brains that President Obregón himself fully realized that he could do nothing! To whom could he have made this admission? As a matter of fact, known to everybody who took an interest in the matter, the President was as superlatively optimistic at that time as he is to-day.

Two months later still more sensational reports filled the newspapers. In the principal journals of New York, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia, the utter breakdown of Obregón's Administration was positively announced as imminent. The following is a sample of the milder strain of leading articles on the subject:

\* March 28th, 1921. It bears the signature Albert W. Fox.

† Washington.

‡ The italics are mine.

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"Mexico, almost bankrupt, labouring under severe economic depression, has been approaching a political crisis for weeks. The call of Congress in special session, with the ensuing disturbance in the Chamber and radical outbreaks in various centres, has brought it to a head. Mexico City regards it as serious. Latest dispatches state that the Liberal-Constitutionalists, who made Obregón President, have formally warned him that the Radical leaders Calles and de la Huerta are plotting to overthrow him. Foreign observers have reported that Obregón's position is insecure. Mr. Stephen Bonsal, writing in the *Evening Post* of March 29th, said that the Republic was on the eve of a severe political upheaval."\*

In connection with this Press campaign it is easy to conjecture, and is well worth remembering, that at that time a revolution was being carefully organized by foreigners against Obregón's Government, and it was to the interest of the revolutionists and their friends in the United States—who were generously providing the funds—that confidence in the stability of that Government should be shaken and the belief inculcated that anarchy was fast returning. The plan appears to have been conceived with ingenuity. The troops of General Pelaez—who as a rebel during the Carranza regime had been in receipt of periodical payments from wealthy oil companies around Tampico with whom he was hand in glove—were to revolt against Obregón. The object of the Press campaign against Mexico in the United States was to prepare the minds of the American people for what was coming. Accordingly, in New York and Washington the word went round that Obregón was doomed. And heavy bets were made on the subject.

Pelaez's troops duly rebelled. Thereupon the oil companies, which used to pay those troops, closed down their works and threw thousands of working men adrift in Tampico. These unemployed men would, it was expected, wreak their vengeance on all and sundry and commit various outrages. Thereupon the United States Government would feel morally obliged to dispatch warships to Tampico, and then the work of "cleaning up" might begin. The Mexican Treasury was depleted. The cost of supporting those labourers and sending

\* Cf. the *New York Evening Post*, May 19th, 1921.

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them back to their homes in the interior would be a heavy burden to it. Added to the cost of suppressing the rebellion, it might occasion serious financial difficulties.

What really happened was this : The unemployed recognized the hand that had struck the blow, and refusing to saddle their own Government with the responsibility, patriotically eschewed manifestations which might cause foreign intervention. In the meanwhile Obregón dispatched troops to Tampico, put an end to the rebellion, fed, housed and repatriated the unemployed.

The orderly demeanour of the working men was a grievous disappointment to the great multitude expecting intervention and waiting for the good time that would ensue upon that. What if there were no available pretext for the dispatch of American warships ? A section of the American Press saw to it that the arrangements should not be marred for lack of a plausible plea. In the absence of riots, narratives of riots would serve the purpose equally well.

A Washington journal published what is known as a "display line," running across the entire front page and in letters upwards of two inches in height, entitled : "Americans Killed in Mexican Riots." Thereupon the story of the bloody outrages was developed in language admitting of no ambiguity. A number of "genuine Americans," who remained anonymous, had been cruelly murdered by a mob of riotous workmen in the Zacamixtle district. Americans in the United States whose kinsmen were working in that district were left for two days in painful suspense as to the fate of their relatives. Public opinion in the States began to veer round to the old idea that Mexicans were indeed incorrigible. Two days later other journals, not those which had started the lie, announced that the story was a fabrication.

The further reckoning of those who were playing for intervention was that marines from the United States warships, once they landed on Mexican soil, would be the object of attack, whereupon the rest would follow as a matter of course. But the warships remained only forty-eight hours and no outrage marked their stay. None the less, a positive statement to the contrary was disseminated over the United States and the believing world by the highly respectable Universal Service, in the guise of a *bona fide* message, announcing that the American

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flag flying from a small boat of the warship *Cleveland* had been torn down and trampled on by Mexicans, that it was "unsafe for Americans to walk the streets of Tampico," and more to the like effect. The circumstance that this and many similar lies were refuted a couple of days later does not seem to impress the reading world with the utter untrustworthiness of narratives about Latin-Americans from the United States, nor to move Latin-Americans to create a special telegraphic and journalistic service for the purpose of acquainting Europeans with the truth, in so far as it concerns them to learn it.

As has been intimated, the warships from the United States duly made their appearance at Tampico, and all Mexico was in a ferment—all except the members of Obregón's Government. They were endeavouring to fulfil their obligations and feared nothing. It was then reported that the warships had been dispatched by the Navy Department without the assent or knowledge of President Harding. However this may have been, they were recalled, but only after this proof was given of the deplorable fact that Mexico, like the Caribbean Republics, never can be sure that a bolt will not fall from the blue sky, never can divine what troubles the morrow may bring from Washington. The revolution was squashed, the newspaper campaign ceased, and the magnates who had foretold the approaching end of Obregón's Government, and more especially those who had paid for this consummation, were disappointed and embarrassed.

This gigantic conspiracy, which is credibly said to have been planned and organized in New Orleans and to have had ramifications in various cities of the United States, gave rise to an extensive literature of revelations, denunciations and abuse. But the tone of the Mexican Press throughout this controversy was reserved and dignified. What it appears to have rendered credible is the share taken by certain oil companies in providing the brains, the money and a favourable Press for the criminal enterprise.\* It was the troops under General Pelaez that revolted, and it was Pelaez himself who publicly testified that oilmen had tampered with his soldiers and officers and allotted a large sum of money for the needs of the rebels.

\* The complicity of many American citizens and of a few officials was alleged publicly on evidence, the force of which I have not had an opportunity of verifying.



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One of these needs was to purchase the treason of army officers in command of important military positions. A colonel who was approached on the subject and, with the knowledge of his superiors, feigned to accede to the proposal that he should surrender Piedras Negras to the rebel General Murguía, received a cheque for twenty thousand dollars on the First National City Bank, which he afterwards returned. He further states that half a million dollars were paid by a certain oil company to the rebel General Murguía. An American capitalist is said by General Gomez to have paid a considerable sum of money to the rebel chief Daniel Herrera, who was in command of the troops against the Government.\* And in an independent New York weekly we read :

“Mr. W. H. Gray, president of the National Association of Independent Oil Producers, publicly charges the Standard Oil Company, not only with engineering a three months’ boycott of Mexican oil to compel the Government to abolish its export tax, but also with direct complicity in plotting the Mexican Revolution which fizzled out so badly early in July, despite the opportune dispatch of two American warships. This charge calls to Heaven for disproof. If it stands, it proves again the absolute unscrupulousness of exploiting interests eager for profit. They are the makers of modern empire. But their power depends upon a lot of popular illusions which these revelations ought to dispel.”†

General Obregón issued the necessary orders, in five days the last of the rebels was disarmed, and among the foreign revolution-mongers in Mexico and the United States there was gnashing of teeth.

But all those subterranean machinations, however momentous they may appear to the Mexican who desires to see his country independent and prosperous, are but the minor operations of a vast campaign, which has the terrestrial planet for its objective. It is true that the Oil Conspiracy, as it is termed, would have drawn the Republic within the Circean circle of bewitched pachyderms, but Mexico is only one of the band of nations whose turn has still to come. And the

\* See the *Mexican Post*, July 16th, 1921 ; *El Democrata*, July 30th, 1921 ; *El Democrata*, August 4th, 1921 ; *El Heraldo de Mexico*, August 21st, 1921 ; *Excelsior*, August 21st, 1921.

† See *The Nation* (New York), September 28th, 1921.

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oil problems form but one of a redoubtable row of Damocles' swords, one of which may at any hour fall on the head of the Republic.

Of these the most disquieting is President Harding's refusal to recognize the Obregón Administration. For with him, as with Secretary Hughes, it constitutes what theologians term a case of conscience. Those two statesmen are conscientiously convinced that it is their duty to barter recognition, as it was traded to Benito Juarez, in return for the grant of certain demands put forward by oilmen whose influence is considerable at election time. Both President Harding and Secretary Hughes are well aware that what they ask President Obregón to do is beyond his powers. The Mexican Constitution\* forbids him to sign any treaty tending to alter guarantees or rights established by the Constitution. On accepting office he swore to observe that Constitution. And these profoundly religious statesmen declare that unless and until he breaks that solemn oath it is their sacred duty to refuse him recognition. But the moment that he betrays the trust placed in him by the Mexican people they will recognize him as its lawful head. Until then they will treat him as representing only himself, will induce France and Britain to do likewise, and will effectually deprive him and his Government of the foreign loans needed for the reforms he has planned, and have Mexico financially boycotted. If the result of this conscientious action be the ruin of Mexico, that is no affair of theirs.

This question of recognition has been exhaustively dealt with already in various books† and pamphlets. Mexican and Yankee jurisconsults are unanimous in stating that the recognition of the government of one established State by another is invariably unconditional. It may be withheld, but not sold or bartered. This doctrine was confirmed and acted upon by Presidents and by State Secretaries of the United States. Secretary Hill,‡ for instance, laid it down that the sole condition of the United States in bestowing recognition was the ability of a Government to hold the reins of power.

\* Article XV.

† See, for example, "Mexico on the Verge" (E. J. Dillon), chap. xvii.: Recognition by Treaty.

‡ In 1904. Instructions transmitted by Secretary Hill to the United States representative in Bogota.

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President Hayes laid down the same rule to be applied to Mexican Governments.

But a Government of the United States considers itself bound by no precedents—not even those which itself created—by no principles, by no compacts, by no considerations of comity. If Japan or Great Britain were to require a treaty binding the Washington State Department to define the Monroe Doctrine, or to assure the rights of Japanese residents against arbitrary State legislation, the outcry against such presumption would be re-echoed from Boston to San Francisco. But the humiliation which it would not brook it blithely inflicts, and the picture of Puritanical statesmen calling upon the President of Mexico to prove his moral fitness for governing by violating the Constitution of his country and breaking his oath in order to satisfy the whims of foreign oilmen and capitalists, is one of the abiding symbols of the new ordering of the world.

It is fair to say that it is not only in its relations with Mexico that the United States Government is thus capricious and wayward. In its dealings with all the nations it is a law unto itself. Lord Robert Cecil, discussing the Mandates in the Council of the League of Nations recently, said that : “ If the question was at a standstill, it would be the fault of the United States, who did not want the question dealt with without them, but at the same time refused the invitations of the Chancellor of the League.”\* And Dr. Charles B. Elliot publicly admitted that the Monroe Doctrine, which “ has become a sort of religion with the masses,” is, as understood by the American people, the principal obstacle to prevent the United States from becoming a member of the League of Nations.†

In vain Press organs in the United States recognized Obregón's sincerity, frankness and readiness to accede to all the reasonable desires of the Washington State Department and sharply censured the obstinacy of that body. To no purpose Chambers of Commerce there called on the Government to recognize the Mexican Administration unconditionally. Messrs. Harding and Hughes remained inexorable.

“ The general attitude of our Government towards Mexico,”

\* Cf. *Westminster Gazette*, September 8th, 1921.

† Paper read before the International Law Congress at The Hague. See the (London) *Times*, September 1st, 1921.

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writes an influential American daily paper, "cannot be defended, nor its methods of procedure. While our correspondence is carried on by Secretary of State Hughes, the public, perhaps unjustly, attributes the spirit in which we proceed to Secretary of the Interior Fall, who is reputed to have large interests in Mexico."\*

Another of the principal journals of the United States acclaims Obregón's programme as admirable and his claim to recognition as unanswerable. "The Executive who stands for such a programme and the followers who uphold it are worthy of more consideration than is implied in demands from our State Department for immediate legislation defining constitutional provisions. The United States, in assuming to dictate what laws Mexico shall pass, does what it would not permit any foreign power in its own case even to suggest."† But *quod licet Jovi non licet bovi*.

If Obregón, and together with him the entire population of Mexico, deserve to be punished because he is unwilling to violate his oath in order to ease the consciences of Messrs. Harding and Hughes, the system, be it religious or political, which enjoins or approves this sentence deserves to be judged by its fruits.

After Obregón's courteous refusal Mexico remained alone among the nations without a single friend to help her even by way of mediation in case of a conflict with the United States. "Zion spreadeth forth her hands and there is none to comfort her." And yet, unlike Zion, Mexico is not to blame. She has never attacked a neighbour, never coveted foreign territory, never aspired to hegemony, never precipitated a war. But all the governments in the world, more especially those on the New Continent, feel vaguely, if they do not realize clearly, that her would-be guardian may become theirs; that the United States is a Titan among mortals; that the movement embodied in its foreign policy is elemental, all-embracing, fateful; that it is not the result of a mere misunderstanding, or a fitful impulse, but the outcome of a fixed idea, against which diplomatic mediation, even though the entire world were to unite in offering it, would be vain and perilous.

Obregón's way of meeting this redoubtable danger is

\* *San Francisco Chronicle*; *Mexican Post*, July 22nd, 1921.

† *The World* (New York), June 28th, 1921.

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transcendental and as interesting as the curious amalgam of politics, finance and religion which evoked it.

But before limning it in outline, it may be worth the reader's while to measure with a glance the magnitude of the crawling glacier that threatens to crush and pulverize himself and his works.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE EXPANSION OF THE UNITED STATES

THE story of the origins, methods and territorial expansion of the great American Republic is a chapter of history which has not yet been written. It has seldom even been sketched. Nor is this to be wondered at. Europeans, statesmen as well as private citizens, are so engrossed by national and continental affairs that they cannot afford to pay much heed to any American policies which have no direct bearings on their own. And yet the subject is highly attractive. It occasionally has a savour of the quaint stories in the early Christian martyrology. And if Gibbon's narrative of the life of the usurer of Trebizond, who, after having been lynched for his misdeeds, became a saint and is England's patron to-day, can still evoke a smile on the lips of the reader, the promotion of the type of adventurer known as "filibuster" to the ranks of a national hero may in coming generations produce a similar effect among dispassionate students of American history.

From a psychological point of view also the activities of United States politicians constitute a veritable revelation, and to Latin-Americans it has been vouchsafed in all its plenitude. Under the charter of the Monroe Doctrine the ruling class of the great Republic—which must not be taken to represent the great people in whose name it acts—has established for its own behoof a new polity which is thoroughly imperialistic, a new diplomacy which is superlatively arbitrary, a new system of ethics which has little if aught in common with morality, and a new language based on the etymological lines of *lucus a non lucendo*. Congruously with these innovations the United States Government, despite its formal aloofness, is coming to realize the Kaiser's ambition, and to have a say in every movement of economic and political interest on the globe,

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whereby matters hitherto deemed to be strictly national have assumed international import in the parlance of these world reformers.

From Connaught to Siberia, from Mesopotamia to China, the interests, rights and claims of the United States permeate the social and political atmosphere of the rest of mankind like a sort of ether, the influence of which it is impossible either to withstand or elude. The wars hitherto waged by its responsible rulers, like that against Spain, are all holy crusades undertaken in the name and for the attainment of exalted ideals. The annexation of the territories of other peoples—like that of over half of the Mexican Republic—are but altruistic sacrifices in fulfilment of the duty imposed by Providence to carry the white man's burden. The same far-reaching principle covers systematic intervention by diplomatists from Washington and the speedy suppression of legitimate comment uttered on American topics of European interest by diplomatists accredited to the United States. Thus, when the North American Legislature has before it a Bill which, if entered on the Statute Book, would play havoc with European commerce, the British and Italian Ambassadors are publicly chidden for pointing out its sinister tendencies, and their plea that the subject is of international moment is rudely swept aside with the oracular utterance that it is a matter of purely domestic concern. On the other hand, the Mexican Government is peremptorily ordered to change its Constitution and modify its domestic legislation in order to suit the convenience and further the interests of fortune hunters from the United States. The most constructive Government which the leading Latin-American Republic has ever yet had is relentlessly boycotted and driven towards revolution and anarchy by the State Department in Washington because it declines to sign a treaty which would violate its Constitution, confer special privileges upon American citizens, and enable the American Government to get the whip-hand of Mexico for all time.

On the other hand, a band of revolutionary plotters in Guatemala which suddenly overthrows the lawfully constituted Administration there, but approves the policy of the United States towards Mexico, receives immediate recognition. Governments which have wrested the reins of power by revolution and bloodshed are condemned with pious horror and

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excommunicated *ipso facto* by the United States; yet when the Republic of Colombia was found wanting in pliancy, a revolution was planned, paid for and carried out there by citizens of the great Democracy; whereupon the Federal forces intervened—in the cause of peace—hindered the Colombian Government from trampling it out, and then gave prompt recognition to the new and obsequious Republic of Panama. The executive director of the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico—a body in close touch with members of the Hughes Cabinet—wrote a letter\* promising the “utmost help to the side of any capable, sincere and *aggressive* Mexican who desires to restore to his country the peace, prosperity, credit and honour it once claimed.” It was such “utmost help” that was vouchsafed to the Colombian citizens when they were urged to rebel and set up a Panama Republic. It was the same timely succour which was offered and given again and again to Mexican traitors and brigands in return for their promises to steer the Ship of State into North American waters as soon as they were placed in charge of the navigation.

In a word, the end, which is always related in some mysterious way to a high humanitarian purpose, never fails to hallow the means. The rulers of the United States are, in the words of St. Paul, “a law unto themselves.”

On the American Continent they cherish an inordinate love for the written word in the form of treaties binding this or that inferior race, but their own part of such compacts is writ in water. Thus the treaty concluded with the Haitians became a dead letter from the outset in those sections which limited the action of the officials or of the armed forces of the United States. For it is a peculiarity of North American civilization, as personated by those politicians, that there is nothing which it cannot do, whereas one of the decisive marks of European culture is that there are very many things which it may not and therefore will not do.

“Cleaning up” and “uplifting” countries which Nature has endowed with mineral wealth is one of the specialities of North American politicians. Senator Borah, one of the fair-minded legislators who speaks with frankness, publicly said

\* In July, 1921. The full text of this confidential missive was published by the Hearst newspapers at the beginning of the year 1922.



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in this connection : “ It has become dangerous for a dependent nation to let the world know that it has valuable resources. As soon as that is discovered there immediately arises a beneficent desire to uplift that country and to supervise that country along ‘ proper ’ channels.”

Outward manifestations of the irrepressible unrest which spurs the North American Republic to so large a daring as world domination have been frequent of late years, and a glance at a few may prove instructive. On the surface of all these mercantile and imperialistic ambitions lies a varnish of altruism which at a distance deceives the uncritical eye, suggesting greatness of mind and tenderness of heart. And the well-known chivalrous generosity of the American people, as distinguished from its spokesmen, confirms the impression. But to a closer view is revealed the sordid reality. Similar surprises have been administered to the foreign observer in the matter of prohibition by austere legislation, which is assumed to be a substitute for private conscience. The Government takes the suppression of alcoholic liquors so seriously to heart that it refuses to respect even the three-mile sea limit, while the ingenious exertions it puts forth to apprehend and punish citizens for drinking liquor on land command a high degree of admiration. But all that incapacitates one for fathoming the spirit in which that same moral Government induces those same citizens to travel on its ships by promising to supply them with liquors *ad libitum* on the high seas.

A quarter of a century ago influential profit-hunters in the United States had powerful motives to draw Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines into their purview. But public opinion there, being sound when left to itself, refused to countenance their designs. Soon afterwards other motives that fell in with the magnanimous temper of the people were forged, and the banner of liberty, brotherhood and various other abstractions was unfurled. In the light of these ostensible aims the war of conquest became a crusade, and Spain's colonies were taken over by the Yankees, who were looked upon by the natives as demi-gods.

During the years that have lapsed since then the populations of those countries have been picking up ideas on the subject of promise and achievement, professions and intentions, and to-day their feeling of bitterness against the Yankee

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amounts almost to hatred. Recently\* an Havana newspaper went so far as to say that the Cubans would be justified in falling foul of North Americans wherever they found them. Another Cuban newspaper, formerly devoted to the United States, published an article of protest against arbitrary rule, and headed it: "We will not be American Vassals."† The treaty which defines the relations between the emancipated island and its emancipator has an addendum termed the Platt Amendment, which entitles the United States to intervene in Cuba whenever and however it pleases. And of this right the fullest use is made. The instructors in the art of self-government and the practice of integrity sent by Washington are all chosen from the army and the marine, because their services cost nothing additional to the taxpayer at home. For many years General Crowder has occupied this enviable post with all the honours and authority of a viceroy. This military chief has played havoc with Cuba's domestic arrangements, compelling many of the most popular Ministers to resign.‡

To-day Cuba is an adjunct of the United States, and bitterly deplores its separation from Spain.

One of the most influential Press organs of Porto Rico published an article some time ago§ on the refusal of the United States to allow them self-government, in which we read:

"When, as a consequence of the Spanish-American war, Porto Rico was transferred to the United States (without our having a say in the matter), we already had a form of self-government which allowed us to legislate without let or hindrance congruously with the peculiar needs and wishes of the country, to negotiate commercial treaties and to shape our own destinies, and we formed one of the forty-nine provinces of the Spanish realm. This home-rule was bestowed upon us

\* August, 1922.

† See *El Debate*, August 17th, 1922.

‡ In September, 1922, General Crowder made several demands upon Cuba as the preliminary condition to America's friendship, such, for instance, as a complete change in the civil service system, reform of the judiciary and the flotation of a "foreign," that is an American, loan. And this ultimatum is declared by the official exegetes of the State Department to be no ultimatum. The *Yankee Dictionary of New Diplomacy* is said to bear out their contention.

§ On November 17th, 1921. The newspaper is *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*.

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by a monarchical government a quarter of a century ago. For nearly twenty-five years we have belonged to the United States of North America, styled the most democratic nation on earth. And yet Porto Rico groans in the chains of slavery under a form of semi-self-government known as the Jones Act, rigid and sharp, which confers upon the Executive—a Yankee—absolute power to veto the acts of the law-givers who are Porto Ricans.

“Our legislators are debarred from passing laws respecting public education, the appointment of school teachers and the election of men to judicial positions. And as though this were not enough, Washington appoints our Commissioner of Education, who is an American, an American auditor, an American Chief of Police, two American judges out of the five in the Supreme Court Bench, an American Chief of the Port and the American heads and almost all the American subordinates of the federal offices except the Post Office Department.” The American Governor, the journal remarks, “is an autocrat who ignores the fact that the strong is strong only that he may aid the weak.” Alas! if this subversive maxim were to be acted upon, what a tremendous change would come over the social and political world!

Thus far has autonomous Porto Rico journeyed on the way of progress since it fell under the tutelage of the United States.

The people of the Philippines, in virtue of what President Harding calls “the revolution of the fates,” were likewise enabled to change the yoke of Spain for that of the North American Republic, and they too are far from satisfied with the results. They were solemnly promised independence on the fulfilment of certain conditions. These conditions were long ago fulfilled. The President of the United States himself publicly proclaimed the fact:

“Allow me,” President Wilson in his message to Congress\* said, “to call your attention to the fact that the people of the Philippine Islands have succeeded in maintaining a stable Government since the last action of the Congress in their behalf, and thus have fulfilled the condition set by the Congress as precedent to a consideration of granting independence to the islands. I respectfully submit that this condition precedent having been fulfilled, it is now our liberty and our duty to keep

\* On December 2nd, 1920.

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our promise to the people of those islands by granting them the independence which they so honourably covet."

Nearly two years have gone by since then but the solemn promise of the United States Government has not been kept. A representative mission, sent by all political parties in the islands, recently presented a most courteous appeal to President Harding,\* praying that he, as trustee of the great Democracy, would honour its plighted word.

President Harding's reply was long, courteous and negative. He hoped that the "mutuality of confidence and esteem" would "abide for all time, no matter what limitations of governments are attached to our relationship." Even therefore though the solemn promise be never redeemed, that pleasing "mutuality" is to abide for ever. . . . It is fair to say that if, as seems fairly well established, the steady, self-directed bent of the rulers of the United States is world-domination, then it is reasonable to foretell that the independence of the Philippines is a dream. President Harding used a form of words in his exhaustive reply which is worth reproducing :

"Fate cast our relationship, and we assumed a responsibility, not only to all the Philippine people, but to all the world as well. We have a high respect for your majority, but no less obligation to your minority, and we cannot be unmindful of that world-responsibility wherein your fortunes are involved in ours."

World-responsibility and Fate are the clue to the situation of all those peoples who are being brought up by hand by the United States.

\* In June, 1922.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HOW HAITI WENT UNDER

HAITI fared very much worse than any of those countries. This little republic is the one Latin-American State whose language is French. In other respects also it stands out among the sister States. It is, for example, the oldest republic on the new Continent—after that of North America. To its credit stands the remarkable fact that it abolished slavery quite half a century before the English-speaking republic was moved by the spirit to do likewise. It made an important contribution to the cause of General Bolivar. It governed itself for a century and eleven years until 1914, when its burden, and much else together with that, was lifted by the United States. And to-day Haiti is virtually a dependency of the North American Republic.

This change, ominous of similar developments in the future, came to pass under conditions worth glancing at, were it only because they put one in possession of a permanent element of latter-day progress. A North American financial institution\* became stock-holder of the National Bank of the Republic of Haiti, and from that day onward the financial control of the Republic by the United States was a much talked of contingency. In fact it was a certainty. For as a witty American recently put it: "On our great Continent it is the flag that follows trade, and not vice versa."

Well, in the summer of 1914 the National Bank of Haiti unexpectedly caused an unpleasant surprise by suspending the execution of a budget convention between itself and the Haitian Government, by which the payment of public expenses had been guaranteed. This shock coincided, as such Latin-American ordeals usually do, with the outbreak of a rebellion in the North.

\* The National City Bank of New York.

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One of the consequences of this cross-fire was the Government's unwilling acceptance of certain conditions imposed by the National Bank of the Republic of Haiti. These conditions deprived the State of the resources necessary for the prosecution of the campaign against the rebels and compelled it to let the revolutionary movement take its course. Thereupon the President,\* seeing that he could not remain at the head of the State without succour from without, very properly resigned. The United States, which preaches the principle of non-intervention in season and out of season, offered to keep him in power on certain conditions. To an unscrupulous individual this temptation would have been irresistible, but Oreste Zamor scouted the notion of imposing himself on the people by means of foreign support. He accordingly laid down his powers, and a senator† was elected to the presidency in his place.

But the new chief had the old financial difficulties to cope with and a fresh political puzzle to solve over and above. He was not recognized by the State Department in Washington, and official recognition, he now learned, could be had only at a price. This price included a material curtailment of the State sovereignty of the Republic and the degradation of Haiti to the condition of demi-semi-independence. For the things which growing communities in the old civilization were wont to acquire by dint of sword and fire, the leaders of the North American Republic secure more rapidly and hold more firmly by means of money. Dollar diplomacy is the label affixed to this procedure by those who practise it and who fondly regard it as a higher form of human progress. It certainly has the effect—which many term an advantage—of saving appearances. And to a section of the English-speaking world appearances are of more importance than the Ten Commandments.

The statesmen in Washington had no objection to the new Administration in Haiti. Their aim went higher and further. On the personal score they seldom have leanings, prejudices or childish scruples. What they are in quest of is substance. The shadow they leave to those who prize it, and as it happens every social and political organism includes defective members who set a high price on phantoms and mirages. The Haitians then were told that they must delegate to Washington a

\* Oreste Zamor.

† Davilmar Theodore.

## President Obregón—a World Reformer

Commission empowered to sign "satisfactory protocols," and among others a convention with the United States for the control of the Haitian Customs, modelled after the convention between the United States and Santo Domingo. Now these conventions and treaties are the special silken cords with which the political sovereignty of so many Latin-American republics have been quietly strangled. Hence they are become the terror of Latin-Americans everywhere, who regard them much as pious mediæval Christians contemplated covenants with the Devil writ or signed with the blood of his predestined victim. The Jones Act in Porto Rico, the Platt Amendment in Cuba, the Dominican-American Convention in Santo Domingo, are some of the odious charters in virtue of which the "inferior races" which concluded them have been raised from the category of independent native States to the class of wards of the great English-speaking Republic, with its unprecedented ideas of civilization, liberty, justice and tolerance.

One of the drawbacks to this promotion in the ranks of advancement is the rooted antipathy of the people themselves to it. They are contented with their own methods of self-development and only ask to be left alone. While recognizing the advantages of North American institutions they plead with much force that what is meat to one man is often poison to another, and that nowhere does this dictum obtain with greater force than in the matter of political and social institutions. And everywhere in Latin America the people ardently desire to move along on their own lines and at their own pace. The Haitians expressed these sentiments in no uncertain words, and the people protested as one man against the draft convention which was finally presented to their Government by the American Minister.\* One of the clauses of this document required that the administration of the custom-houses of Haiti should pass to the United States, and that no reduction of the dues should be made without the previous approval of Washington. The Haitian Government replied very courteously that the sense of the people was opposed to any such arrangement, whereupon the American Minister assured them that in that case his Government would not push the matter further.

But two days before this assurance was given, American

\* Mr. Bailly Blanchard.

## How Haiti went under

marines, who are the chosen administrators of moral purges on the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, had carried to their gunboat the strong boxes of the National Bank, containing half a million American dollars which were to have been used for the redemption of the paper currency. The demands of the Haitian authorities for an explanation of this high-handed act were ignored and the money then seized still lies deposited in a New York bank.

The next scene of the Haitian drama was the capital of the Republic. The actors were malcontents goaded to the acme of frenzy, partly by fear of encroachments on their State and partly by the attitude of their President, and it was against his palace that they directed their attack. Wounded in the affray and fearing the worst, he fled for asylum to the French Legation. There he would have been secure but for the circumstance that the governor of the prison, acting, as it was said, under his instructions, had had several political prisoners put to death the night before. These tidings stung the multitude to new madness. The criminal President and his obsequious henchmen must be lynched, cost what it might. Like famished wolves the tumultuous throng rushed into the sanctuary in which the President had taken refuge, flung him into the street and quickly sent him to his last account. This was a serious misdeed, which may be satisfactorily explained, but can neither be justified nor excused. It constituted a flagrant violation of foreign territory, almost as blameworthy as the invasions of various Latin-American republics by United States troops without a declaration of war or a motive which The Hague Tribunal would endorse.

But the deaths of the President and of the prison governor were the only deeds of blood that marked this sudden outbreak. Crimes against life or property there were none. A Committee of Public Safety took charge of public affairs, which bade fair to become normal again. But on the following day American marines invaded Haiti, occupied the capital, disarmed the inhabitants and opened a series of conferences with members of the Legislature, the upshot of which was the election to the presidency of a man highly approved by the American forces. This President\* was only two days in office when he received a draft treaty which he was peremptorily called on to accept

\* Dartiguenave by name.



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and sign without more ado, and the Haitian National Assembly was told at the same time that it must at once pass a resolution authorizing him to sign it. Now there was no need of any such express authorization, because the power to sign treaties with foreign States was vested in the President by the Constitution. This was pointed out to the American representative, who, admitting the plea, withdrew, but sent a note next day insisting on his demand and setting, in the form of an ultimatum, a time limit within which it must be complied with. The Haitian Government replied that it would willingly begin conversations with a view to drawing up a treaty of amity, but that numerous paramount reasons forbade the acceptance of a ready-made covenant drafted without discussion and imposed without appeal. Rather than be a party to such a transaction the members of the Government would resign in a body.

During this exchange of views the Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces\* seized three of the Haitian custom-houses and evicted the officials. President Dartiguenave issued a proclamation protesting against this high-handed act, to which the American Commander replied in a counter proclamation announcing that only he had control of the Government and he had put the capital and its environs under martial law. All the exertions of the Haitians to obtain some modifications of the draft treaty proved vain, whereupon the new State Secretary resigned himself to the inevitable and affixed his signature to the fatal document, which was subsequently ratified by the Legislature.† He then awaited the return to normal life which was the object of the arrangement. This return was distinctly promised, nay proposed, by the United States Government, but was never realized. The treaty itself was misconstrued.‡ After it had been ratified in Washington it remained a dead letter. The finances, the administration of justice and various other functions of State sovereignty were in the hands of the Chiefs of Occupation, while the municipalities were controlled by the American military authorities. Heavy expenditure was

\* Rear-Admiral Caperton.

† November, 1915.

‡ The limitations expressly set by Article 2 on the attributes of the President of Haiti were arbitrarily extended, and some of his rights transferred to the President of the United States.

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incurred for public works respecting which the Haitian Government was not consulted. The members of that Government, in a survey of the situation, wrote: "It can be said then that the Treaty of September 16th has not been carried out, and that this violation of the engagements entered into is due to the agents of the American Government."\*

The subsequent story of American rule in Haiti, as attested by public documents, official acts and eye-witnesses, is of a piece with the foregoing. The natives have sunk to the level of helots and the foreigners risen to the pinnacle of supermen.

From the New York bankers to the simple marines, every American in Haiti is a privileged being. "The vocation of being a foreigner," we are told, "is lucrative." How lucrative we learn from the deposition of the President of the West Indies Trading Co., who stated: "Those of us who believe in the future of Haiti believe that we would not invest capital in Haiti if we could get only 9 or 10 per cent. out of it. We believe that the prospects are *far in excess* of 10 per cent." In Santo Domingo an obscure paymaster has swung himself into the lucrative position of "financial mogul." In Haiti young lieutenants live on the fat of the land, dwell in spacious houses, maintain a retinue of servants and, in their capacity of gendarme officers, have at their service automobiles which are paid for by the inferior race, on the principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." The Chiefs of the Occupation are irresponsible arbiters of everything connected with the social and commercial as well as the political life of the "uplifted." Even honest Americans in business there, who see and deplore the abuses which are bringing the good name of the United States into disrepute, dare not raise their voices in protest or in warning. Were they rash enough to attempt anything of the kind they would, according to their own account, be promptly put out of business. And it is worthy of note that the only American civilian who ventured to criticize the Occupation in public was also the only American civilian ever killed in Haiti.

To shift the blame for those incongruities on marines fresh from the southern States and other half-baked citizens of the great Republic is easy, and the device has been frequently

\* "Exposé Général de la Situation d'Haiti," année 1917, p. 16.

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resorted to. But it satisfies nobody, and least of all the victims. For behind the marines stand the politicians of Washington. It was Secretary Daniels who cabled to Admiral Caperton to seize the Haitian custom-houses, adding significantly: "Have President Dartiguenave solicit it, but whether President so requests or not, proceed." It is the State Department of Washington which is answerable for violating the clauses of the treaty, which itself drafted and forced the Haitian Government to sign and ratify.

"At least no one could expect," writes the *New York Nation*, "that the United States would itself fail—as it has—to carry out a single one of its own obligations in the treaty which it had written and imposed. The formula of the godly crowd is stereotyped: 'We love the Haitians, Dominicans, Mexicans, etc. They are a charming, harmless people who keep aloof from politics, good-natured children. But unluckily they are dominated by a band of lawless revolutionists who play havoc with the country. And these are the criminals from whom our boys are emancipating those republics.'"

There are grounds for this fondness for the Haitian "common" man, whose labour is still to be had for twenty cents a day. There is likewise a cogent reason for the hatred evinced for Haitian "intellectuals," for it is they who, with their discourses about the wages of slaves and the grinding oppression of capitalists, hinder foreign profit-hunters from making the best of cheap labour. These motives are mostly hidden behind paradisaical fig leaves.

But not all Americans feel the need of the foliage of high purpose to cover their nakedness. One of the most outspoken, who is the general manager of the United West Indies Corporation, said in answer to a remark by Mr. Ernest Gruening: "There has been a lot of bunk about helping the Haitians. I am not here to help the Haitians. I am here to make money out of Haiti for myself and my friends."\*

The truth—and it is a bitter truth—would seem to be that the entire American Administration, beginning with the President and Mr. Secretary Daniels and terminating with the individual who burned M. St. Pierre's body with a red-hot iron, are morally responsible for wanton atrocities in Haiti which, had they been recorded of Tsar Nicholas' Government in the

\* The (*New York*) *Nation*, February 8th, 1922.

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Caucasus, Finland, or among the Jewish populations of the southern and western provinces of Russia, would have provoked an outburst of execration in the United States and called into being there a crusade against their authors. And not all the florid tributes to Holy Russia's civilizing mission nor the glare of Christian Orthodoxy would have dazzled the eyes of the decent onlooker. But what happens on the American Continent is a different matter. It is no man's concern—a mere domestic affair which leaves President Harding free to assure his countrymen that they are the salt of the earth, whose mission is to regenerate and guide the world.

Arbitrary imprisonment of Haitian officials\* without trial, charge or explanation, exasperated a body which it could neither convince nor discourage, and sowed broadcast the seeds of race hatred among a once friendly people. But not one of the objects which alone might have been invoked to palliate the entire disregard of international law and custom which marked the methods of the Americans was realized. Few of these were seriously undertaken. Domestic tranquillity, for instance, was thoroughly destroyed "because the permanent and brutal violation of individual rights of Haitian citizens was a perpetual provocation to revolt."†

The representatives of the United States, in their quest of methods of governing a free people against its will, harked back to the pre-revolutionary French system and introduced the hateful *corvée* which it was one of Turgot's great feats to have abolished. High roads for the purpose of facilitating military operations against themselves were constructed by the forced unpaid labour of the Haitian peasants. The gendarmerie, seconded by American marines and containing a considerable sprinkling of criminals and suspects, enforced these and kindred edicts, and one can hardly wonder at the spurts of angry resistance to which these amazing expedients provoked the more active layer of the population. A good-humoured American onlooker who was shown about the country by the Marine Corps, and may be supposed to have a natural leaning towards

\* M. Magloire, for instance, the verifier of the accounts of the communes, was imprisoned for three weeks. After his release he was re-arrested and given to understand that his personal liberty depended upon his resignation. He took the hint, resigned, and was not further molested.

† "Exposé Général.

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his fellow-countrymen, when dealing in his book with the bands of recalcitrants termed *cacos*, which these measures called into existence, presents us with the following sketch :

“ In perfect frankness it must be admitted that this (the resurrection of the banditry known as *cacoism*) was partly the fault of the Americans. . . . In their eagerness . . . the forces of occupation resurrected an old French law called the *corvée* . . . but they (the Haitians) probably would have endured the resurrected *corvée* had it been applied in strict legality—a few days’ labour in their own locality—instead of being carried out with too energetic a hand. When they were driven from their huts at the point of a gendarme rifle, transported, on their own bare feet, to distant parts of the country, and forced to labour for weeks under armed guards, it is natural that they should have concluded that these new-coming foreigners with white skins were planning to reduce them again to the slavery they had thrown off more than a century before. The result was that a certain percentage of the forced labourers caught up any weapon at hand and took to the hills as *cacos*.”\*

A French priest testified before the Senatorial Commission that to his knowledge 250 houses of peaceable Haitians were burned.

These incongruous exertions to “clean up” Haiti were long and strenuously hidden from the people of the United States. Moral purification, as American politicians envisage it, luxuriates in darkness and eschews daylight. Hence the illuminating rays which the Press would fain have shed were promptly quenched by the purifiers. And some of the most serious quasi-scientific periodicals of North America were free to fulminate their thunders against the Haitians. One of these assured its readers that “conditions in Haiti were brought about by the actions of, not only scores, but hundreds of petty bands, who, gathering around a small group of malcontents, would war against each other and against the marines, *many of the latter having been murdered in cold blood from ambush and by the worst kind of guerrilla warfare.*”† How many marines were thus murdered and how many Haitians ?

\* Page 129 of Mr. Franck’s book on the West Indies, quoted in the (New York) *Nation*, April 6th, 1921, p. 508.

† The italics are not in the original, which appeared in the *Nation* of April 6th, 1921.

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Mr. Franck, whom that journal appealed to as an authority, answered the query thus: "Up to date at least three thousand bandits have been killed as against four Americans—a major and a sergeant were shot from ambush and two privates, who lost their lives from over-confidence."\* Those of the three thousand natives who were not hanged or beaten to death had their lives snuffed out by means of machine guns, military planes and armoured cars. It was purification made easy by applied science. But the Army of Occupation continued to be as unpopular as before. "By dint of violence you cannot win love," says a Russian proverb. The torturings, hangings, lynchings and wholesale executions were so many blots on the scutcheon of the unsuspecting American people in whose name they were perpetrated. That and nothing more.

True, the treaty† provided redress. But the treaty was a political mirage. It enacted that the American officers, most of whom had been privates in the Marine Corps, would be superseded by Haitians, when the latter were "judged capable of carrying out their duties effectively." This, like so many other saving clauses of the treaty, has never been put in force. The plighted word of the American Government, representative Haitians aver, has not been redeemed, and solid facts bear out their complaint. A stifling nightmare crushed the nation. Crowds of people forsook their native country and fled to Cuba. Representations, argumentative, suasive and forceful, were made at various times by the Haitian authorities to their mentors and guardians at Washington, but they were as words uttered in the desert.

"If a paid official," President Dartiguenave said, "reports to the executive power, his salary is cut off, if indeed he is not arrested and tried by court martial, whether he be a judge, a government commissioner or a mayor, and this happens in contravention of the law and Articles 101 and 102 of the Constitution."

It is instructive to find that at various times the salaries of the President of the Republic, the State Secretaries and the members of the Legislative Council have been stopped because these officials refused to forbid the importation of foreign gold into Haiti as the National City Bank of New York demanded.

\* Page 138 of Mr. Franck's book, already quoted.

† Concluded on September 16th, 1915.

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“Not only have American officials,” we are told, “done nothing that could have been done for the intellectual development and economic prosperity of the country, but they oppose the Government’s work in this direction. Particular resistance is made to projects dealing with the education of the people, such as for the preparation of teachers for primary education and agricultural schools.” It is odd to find this same complaint so often uttered against the American Government as the educator of “inferior races,” and one can be perfectly certain that the American people, who hunger and thirst after knowledge, would not countenance such obscurantism were it brought to their notice at a time when they could impart the force of electoral decisions to their liberal views.

When we remember the tone of exaltation in which the gospel of democracy, liberty and government by consent of the people is pitched in the United States, and the eagerness of its politicians in their speeches and writings to spread these doctrines and bring the rights of humanity out into full day, we are amazed at the attachment which, when administering the affairs of “inferior races,” they exhibit to dictatorial methods and institutions. In Mexico they admire the despot Porfirio Diaz as an ideal President, and they have been busy seeking his like ever since his fall. In Cuba they always have a man in power who, even when he cannot see eye to eye with the politicians of Washington, is none the less ready to go hand in hand with them in the conduct of public affairs. In Guatemala they threw over President Herrera and recognized his successor on cognate grounds. In Haiti the same ideas produced the same results.

Haiti possessed a Constitution which was neither better nor worse than the constitutions of Latin-American republics generally, of which the gravest defect is their similarity to that of the United States. Fidelity to the ordinances of that charter was at once the measure of the integrity of public servants and the guarantee of the rights of the population. Yet the Washington State Department began its educational work by imposing on the Republic a Convention\* which ran directly counter to provisions of that legal instrument, whereupon a revision of certain fundamental statutes became indispensable. Now there was only one way of effecting this

\* That of September, 1915.

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revision, by a vote of the two legislative chambers meeting as a National Assembly. As this procedure, however, might be utilized by the people's representatives for the purpose of stating their case and publishing their grievances, it was summarily rejected by the American authorities, and a state-stroke was deliberately resorted to which brought the law into contempt and contributed to demoralize the people. The Haitian President was constrained to issue an illegal decree dissolving the Senate and metamorphosing the Chamber of Deputies into a Constituent Assembly. He further had to create a Council of State. The effect of these measures was to set law at naught, to subvert the system of governance established by the people and to substitute a foreign dictatorship for a democratic regime.

Of the timid and vigorous protests and technical appeals to legal tribunals which these devices evoked, the American authorities took no cognizance beyond employing brute force to carry out their schemes. The parliament house was closed and gendarmes kept the deputies outside. In vain did the Civil Court ordain the reopening of the Legislature; the Commander of the Troops of Occupation declared that the execution of their decision would be treated as an act of provocation. The conflict waxed more acute when the senators and deputies assembled in provisional quarters, and the President of the Senate officially declared that the attempt to abolish that body "is a flagrant violation of the Constitution" and is therefore "a revolutionary act."\* And when the senators actually forgathered they were peremptorily ordered by an American officer to quit the premises lest a worse thing befall them.

The Press, which was the last resort of the champions of law and order, was next throttled.† Discontent spread and grew intense when the electoral law was altered, the number of deputies reduced and *obligatory* suggestions from the Wash-

\* Letter to the Chief of the United States Expeditionary Forces in Haiti, April 27th, 1916.

† *Le Constitutionnel* was suppressed. The proprietor of *Le Nouvelliste*, for having announced the recall of the Financial Adviser, was arrested, imprisoned, sentenced to a fine of \$300, and forced to suspend his paper for three months. These are but specimens of liberty of the Press. Editors Lanoue and Jolibois were imprisoned for leaving blank spaces in their newspapers into which, according to the court martial, inflammatory sentiments could be read.



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ington State Department were announced. The common people, finding that the fundamental statutes were flung into the rubbish heap and their professional law-givers dealt with as misdemeanants or criminals, felt themselves free to apply the same dissolvent principle to other recognized restraints. Lawlessness became rife in the country and occasionally assumed untoward forms.

In the meanwhile the northern guardians of the Republic, acting through the Haitian President, ordered general elections on the new register, and had them supervised by American officers. The outcome was so satisfactory to the foreign administrators that the Commander of the Pacific Division sent a cable congratulating President Dartiguenave. Having assembled a few days later under these cheering auspices, the deputies and senators were taken aback when told that a messenger had come to the House to summon the Speaker of the National Assembly to the presence of the Chief of the Gendarmerie. The Speaker replied that, as the House was in session and he was presiding, he regretted his inability to go at once, but that he would appear as soon as ever he was free. But the Americans would not wait. An American brigadier-general tore into the House, followed by American officers armed with revolvers, and handed to the Speaker a document proclaiming the dissolution of the legislative assembly. The Speaker declined to read the decree. That day all newspaper editors were called to the gendarmerie and ordered to publish nothing about the dissolution.

A twelvemonth after the second dissolution of the Haitian Parliament the American authorities yearned for a new Constitution, just as though they too were smitten with the mania of constitution-making that possesses certain of the republics which they periodically hold up to ridicule. This time a new procedure, theretofore unknown to Haiti, was resorted to: a plebiscite, but a plebiscite of a wholly new type, defined in the new dictionary of diplomatic phrases. To begin with, it was presided over by American officers. The citizens were constrained to take part in it. The ballot papers were distributed by a member of the financial administration, who was seated opposite the voting booths. There was only one kind of ballot in use, and it bore the word "Oui." A bundle of papers with "Non" was left tied together on the table, and a few of them

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were handed to confederates in order to maintain the simulacrum of legality. Spies kept watch at the ballot boxes, and the few officials who had the means and the courage to deposit a negative vote were dismissed from their posts.\*

The latest Yankee scheme for the enslavement of Haiti is the flotation by the National City Co. of a \$16,000,000 loan as part of an authorized \$10,000,000 loan. This burden is being illegally imposed upon that helpless people. It is neither needed nor desired by the nation, nor is it within Haiti's financial capacity to repay it. Senator Borah declared that probably not one-fifth would go to the development of Haiti, and even this small fraction is likely to be used for its further enslavement through land-surveying by which title to lands acquired by American development companies may be validated.†

Those were some of the things which were done in the green tree, so to say, in the upper layer of the population; what occurred in the lower constitutes a stigma on the forces of occupation. It is but fair to add that the American people is not directly answerable for the outrages on the wretched people of Haiti, who were suddenly reduced to the status of "niggers," and treated as rebels to boot. They were imprisoned in gaols, whence twenty-four per cent. a month were carried out and buried. They were tortured with red-hot irons and with an electric current from a field radio, or subjected to the horrible "water-cure." They were shot down, hanged or beaten to death according to the humour of their civilizers.

A number of noble-minded men in the United States raised a corner of the veil behind which this amazing way of uplifting a neighbouring people was being tried so drastically, and they made their voices heard on behalf of outraged humanity. The only outcome of this appeal to justice was the creation of an ornamental Court of Inquiry, which left on the American public the impression that things were not nearly as bad as they had been painted and convinced the Haitians that the American people condoned or connived at horrors which in truth it would gladly have swept away. Some special pleaders urged with more accuracy than point that in many parts of the United

\* See the interesting account published by Pastor Evans, of the Protestant Church of St. Mark (Haiti), in the *New York Herald*, October 25th, 1920.

† The (N. York) *Nation*, October 25th, 1922.

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States white prisoners still undergo, even before their trial, “very severe treatment of the third degree, and that the coloured man abroad is not entitled to claim a privilege in this respect.”

The allegation is true enough, although the conclusion drawn from it is disgraceful. In the State prison at Jackson, according to American papers, insane convicts are brutally flogged, “incredible cruelties are practised on the young men and boys confined in the State Reformatory at Ionia,” and “conditions of filth, neglect and immorality too vile for words” prevailed in the Industrial Home for Boys at Lansing as recently as the year 1921.\* But, as the Haitians retorted, these and other incongruities nowise weaken the case against the forces of occupation in Haiti. They merely show that before attempting to “clean up” Haiti, Santo Domingo or any other Latin-American Republic, it behoves the would-be reformers to lead the purifying waters of an Alpheus through the Augean stables at home.†

\* See the (New York) *Nation*, January 4th, 1922.

† See an illuminating and depressing account of the American prison in the United States by an American (Frank Tannenbaum) in the *Atlantic Monthly* for November, 1921.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### EXEUNT SANTO DOMINGO AND NICARAGUA

SANTO DOMINGO'S alleged failing was a sinful fondness for revolutions. And it cannot be gainsaid that there was some truth in the charge. The bulk of the people were quiet withal, law-abiding and alien to all attempts at violence. They attended to their business unmoved by political claptrap. Revolution in that country was hardly more than a sport, something like a free fight at an Irish wake or at a fair in the Donnybrook days, only less fatal to life. In the year 1912, for example, the revolutionists were at work eleven months in succession, but their operations were mostly confined to marches and counter-marches, with occasional rifle practice which resulted mainly in a loss of ammunition. It did not sensibly affect the foreign trade of the country, which was flourishing the while. The war on Santo Domingo, which in the new diplomatic idiom is termed "the discharge of a moral duty," was brought about by the usual methods of fraud, violence and secrecy.

At the close of the year 1914 Señor Jimenez was duly elected President of that Republic, and for two years the country enjoyed relative immunity from the national "sport." One day a difference of opinion arose between the President and one of his State Secretaries—a common occurrence in all republics. But it was forthwith magnified by Americans into a State-stroke executed by the latter, who was falsely said to have deposed his chief. This poisoning of the sources of information is the invariable overture of these national tragedies. Thereupon the United States Government took action, dispatched the ever-ready marines, and inaugurated the work of pacification in the usual way and with the usual brutal accompaniments which Latin-Americans have come to associate with those

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forces. This invasion, the Dominican Government rightly held, was an act of war, aggravated by the circumstance that it was waged without previous declaration, against a friendly nation. That it also violated the Constitution of the United States as well as that of the invaded country was an irrelevant detail. It undoubtedly constituted a breach of the existing treaties between both republics. And it also amounted to an infringement of the resolution not to intervene which was proposed by the United States itself and adopted at the third International Conference of The Hague. But the junta in Washington called it a moral duty, and the new nomenclature is now as obligatory as the Monroe Doctrine. Among those who officially helped to discharge this moral obligation were a few individuals whose names deserve the immortality of infamy, and seem to have attained it among the wretched Dominicans. For they moved through the entire gamut of bestial ferocity, inflicting upon the simple-minded people horrors akin to those which humanity flattered itself had vanished together with the Holy Inquisition.

One of these ogres, to whom one grudges the name of man, was Charles Merkel, who had served for eighteen years in the United States Marine Corps, and had attained the rank of a full-fledged captain there. This monster literally gloated over human suffering, and in his dealings with the kind-hearted, easy-going folk of the Dominican Republic applied the horrible "water-cure" and "every form of torture imaginable." Other officers, one of them Merkel's senior, indulged in similar savagery, but Merkel outdid his companions in the diabolical ingenuity with which he invented new modes of vivisection and glutted his passion for tormenting his fellows. Complaints of a concrete nature were made to his superiors, but they had no immediate result, the presumption being that the Marine Corps is an exemplary body of men. Consequently, he was allowed to go on practising those nameless cruelties *for at least six months* longer. At length an investigation confirmed many of the gravest charges against him and it was decided to try him by court martial. But a few days later he committed suicide. "Scarred and mutilated victims" appeared before the Senatorial Commission to exhibit their mangled bodies and testify to the methods which were presented to the world under the mask of moral uplifting.

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The following summary of the history of Santo Domingo during the six years' "cleaning up" by an optimistic, good-natured Yankee spectator\* is enlightening:

"The great majority of the forces of occupation were well-meaning young fellows who often lacked experience in distinguishing outlaws from honest citizens, with the result that painful injustices were sometimes committed. These ignorant, or movie-trained, young fellows were sent out into the hills to hunt bandits. They came upon a hut, found it unoccupied, and touched a match to the nipe thatch. They probably thought such a hovel was of no importance anyway, even if it were not a bandit haunt, whereas it contained all the earthly possessions of a harmless family. In their ignorance of local customs they could not know that the entire household was out working in their jungle yuca-garden. Or they found only the women and children at home, and burned the house because these could not explain where their man was. Or again, they met a man on a trail and asked him his business, and because he could not understand their atrocious imitation of Spanish, or they his reply, they shot him so as to be on the safe side. In still other places they burned the houses of innocent accomplices, because bandits had commandeered food and lodging there. If one can believe half the stories that are current in all circles throughout Santo Domingo, the Germans in Belgium had nothing on some of our own 'leather-necks.'"

The editor of the influential New York weekly, the *Nation*, together with Senators Borah and King and a few other courageous citizens, have rendered sterling services to their country as well as to the cause of humanity by repeatedly turning the flashlight of publicity on the dismal tomb of national honour on the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. They certainly did much towards awakening their countrymen to a salutary sense of duty.

Nobody would dream of laying those abominations to the charge of the generous American people any more than one should fix responsibility for the revolutionary misdeeds of, say, Francisco Villa on the kindly folk of Mexico. But as a fair-minded and courageous American observer aptly put it:

\* Cf. the (New York) *Nation*, April 6th, 1921, p. 508.

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“Whether or not these officers’ performances are unrepresentative—which nobody will for an instant deny—they are an inevitable accompaniment of the sort of campaign of ‘pacification’ which we carried on in Santo Domingo and Haiti; and belatedly repudiating or even court-martialling an occasional ultra-conspicuous offender neither restores the lives of their innocent victims nor indemnifies their relatives or the tortured survivors.”\*

The behaviour of the Dominicans under this intense and chronic provocation was admittedly exemplary. Their protests were dignified and free from recrimination, and their demands exempt from rancour. They asked for no retribution or compensation, yearned only for their independence and the friendship of the United States. And it is noteworthy that throughout their long ordeal only one American citizen lost his life among them, and that was by a stray shot aimed at an ex-President, whereupon the relatives of the victim received an indemnity of thirty-three thousand dollars. For five years the inhabitants suffered the seven vials of North American purification to be poured out upon them. They were killed by hundreds, tortured and maimed, their substance wantonly destroyed by robbery and arson, their state funds dispensed by “American political hangers-on of inferior type.”† Thus a loan of two and a half million dollars was negotiated for the Republic by the United States local military Government, bearing interest that varies from nine to nineteen per cent., which has to be paid by the uplifted inhabitants. This loan is guaranteed by the entire customs receipts of the country, in other words it is a rust-proof chain.

In vain did protest after protest and petition after petition bring the sufferings of the nation to the cognizance of President Harding, who, when a candidate for the highest office in his country, had publicly declared himself an enemy to all such high-handed action. And when an imposing demonstration took place in Santo Domingo City, at which the venerable Archbishop Nouel and the members of the universities were present, the Washington officials, solicitous for the perpetuation of their handiwork, belittled this expression of national opinion as a movement organized by mere agitators to which no heed

\* Ernest H. Gruening in the *Nation*, January 4th, 1922.

† The *Nation*, June 29th, 1921.

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should or would be paid. When a newspaper\* in the Virgin Islands printed a Federated Press dispatch about the occupation in Santo Domingo, the editor was officially censured. "This Government," it was announced, "cannot look with tolerance upon any article tending to discredit the military forces of the United States, who are acting under the strict orders of the President."† As though the utmost discredit had not been brought upon those forces by degenerates like Captain Merkel and his ilk, who were surely not acting under strict orders of the President. Jonathan Swift wrote: "Those who have used to cramp liberty have gone so far as to resent even the liberty of complaining, although a man upon the rack was never known to be refused the liberty of roaring as loud as he thought fit." But that was under the old dispensation.

The credit for shedding light upon the unsunned depths of the Dominican limbo belongs, as has been said, to a group of public-spirited Americans whose patriotism is quickened with a passion for justice and truth. Opinion in the United States was stirred at length and the junta of interventionists felt constrained to beat a retreat. But in yielding to moral pressure they strove hard to confine their concessions to the shadow while tightening their grip on the substance. The State Department agreed to put a term to the occupation, but framed a set of conditions which tended to bury the independence of Santo Domingo for all time. The evacuation was to be superintended by a *joint* commission, the American members to be appointed by the United States Navy Department and the Dominicans by the American Military Governor, that being the new meaning attached to the word "joint."

But it was stipulated that all the misdeeds, as well as all the criminal blunders of the junta and of their handy men and marines in the past, were to be ratified as just and honourable by the victimized nation. The loan mentioned above was to be accepted by the nation and the customs receipts of the Republic to be administered by an American answerable only to the United States, and this gentleman's powers might be extended to the collection and disbursement of such portion of the "internal revenue of the Republic as may prove necessary." . . . For the protection of life and property, after

\* The *Emancipator*.

† The *Nation*, June 21st, 1922.



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which the State Department looks so sharply in the republics of "inferior races," a national guard was ordered to be maintained. A national guard? National, in the new sense which that word has acquired in the diplomatic dictionary compiled by the State Department, that is a guard officered by Americans, whose heavy expenses would be charged to the Dominicans, who themselves would be permitted to become officers when "competent to undertake such service." What this proviso meant was obvious enough to all who watched the working of the same limitation in Haiti, where uncultured privates of the Marine Corps are become officers in the Haitian gendarmerie, whereas well-educated natives who graduated at the Military Academy of Saint Cyr at Versailles have not yet, after six years, been deemed "competent."

Twice the Dominican Republic rejected the humiliating conditions with which offers of evacuation were hedged round. One of these was drafted by the well-known Senator McCormick, who was anxious to introduce a clause enabling the United States Government to invade the country and let loose naval forces there whenever the humour took it. But the tenacity of the Dominicans and the pressure of public sentiment in the United States have at last scored a relative victory in the shape of a new set of proposals for evacuation, which will be accepted as the best available. In this plan some of the obnoxious clauses of the scheme just outlined have been eliminated, but by no means all. Thus the principal edicts promulgated in the past by the Military Government are to be declared legal, and the American customs receivership to be continued for several years longer.

This arrangement is a bad best, but when a Latin-American republic is in the leading strings of the United States even Atropos herself cannot sever them all at once. This bitter truth was doubtless present to the mind of the editor of one of the principal Dominican Press organs when he composed a funeral oration over the Republic and wrote: "Alas, for us and for our children! For the captivity will be everlasting."\* And in spite of the final compromise which has been, so to say, extorted from the Washington State Department by the conscience of the American people and acquiesced in by the Dominican Republic, that editor may prove to be a true prophet.

\* *El Tiempo*, in July, 1921.

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In the story of Nicaragua's downfall we here and there come across an episode which vies with legend in thrilling interest and rivals ancient epos in dramatic situation. But in its broad outlines the narrative is a clumsy translation into sordid terms of politics and finance of the fable of the spider and the fly. The Latin-American republics which lie, so to say, at the door of the United States are looked upon by those groups who shape most of the foreign relations of the world's greatest democracy as a vast field of enterprise, but too often enterprise of that selfish kind which springs from thirst of plunder, place and prestige. Financiers, capitalists and adventurers select among the republics a seemingly suitable victim, weave a web, entrap the helpless organism, and suck its vital juices. In the meanwhile the confederate politician stands by and fructifies stage by stage the opportunity to win laurels for himself by making vassals for his country.

The generous public of the United States, who are supposed to govern themselves and to be qualified to guide others, know literally nothing of what is going on until they are suddenly confronted with an accomplished and discreditable fact which they are incapable of approving and unable to undo. Thus gunboats and marines are dispatched against the "sister republics" without warrant or grounds, for, in order to eschew the necessity of laying the matter before the people's representatives, the word "war" is eliminated and some godly slogan borrowed from the new diplomatic jargon is used in its stead. In all this the part played by the Administration is unworthy of a great State, while the rôle assigned to the people is humiliating. This curious distribution of functions, no less than the results which it was intended to achieve, are without parallel in history. On several occasions when for technical reasons the doings of this politico-financial junta had to be submitted to the American Senate for approval, as, for example, when Nicaragua was being manacled and shackled by the Knox-Castrello Convention, that body indignantly and repeatedly refused to give them countenance. But thereupon a fresh version of the iniquitous compact was speedily drafted and ingeniously disguised, and in a moment of bewilderment, when all thoughts were centred on the world-war, was pushed through the legislature expeditiously.

As in the stirring times of the Italian republics any military

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adventurer might hope to rise to the position of potentate, so to-day an obscure book-keeper, striving to make both ends meet on two hundred and odd pounds a year, becomes the Dictator of the Republic of Nicaragua by dint of calculating passivity. He merely allowed himself to be used as a straw-man of the United States. The individual who was thus pitchforked into power was named Adolfo Diaz, and his personal insignificance serves to bring into sharp relief the omnipotence of the members of the North American junta and the unflinching tenacity with which they exercise it.

This wretched Nicaraguan's career was briefly this : While sitting on his stool at the office of an American mining company at a moment when a revolution in Nicaragua seemed highly desirable, he learned that a conspiracy was being hatched against the President—Zelaya. In this conspiracy Yankee "filibusters" were taking an active part, as dynamiters and bomb-throwers. The plotters needed funds, and these were generously provided by the struggling book-keeper. This individual contributed to the enterprise six hundred thousand dollars in gold. It is superfluous to add that the source of his amazing wealth and the mainspring of his munificence are among those Transatlantic mysteries which never find an official solution. The Nicaraguans have their own story ready, which they confirm by producing dispatches from the United States Consul at Bluefields, Nicaragua, to the Secretary of State in Washington, in one of which that official displays an intimate knowledge of the plans of the conspirators and announces to the State Secretary in Washington the day of the revolt and the programme of the plotters. None the less the historian will hesitate to implicate the official world at this stage in the sinister plot. At any rate it was not until the revolt threatened to end in a miscarriage that the Washington Government made its formal appearance on the scene.

The immediate occasion throws a curious light upon the loose and mutable canons of the new American diplomacy. President Zelaya had a number of troops aboard a transport ready for service against the rebels. He was confident of success and might have achieved it but for the *deus ex machina* from the north. The two Yankee "filibusters" were selected by the conspirators, being perhaps deemed inviolable by virtue of their nationality, to blow up those troops with dynamite,

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and having been caught red-handed were executed. Thereupon the State Secretary in Washington,\* maintaining that the death of these two men constituted a breach of "the enlightened practice of civilized nations," launched a decree excommunicating Zelaya from the church of political orthodoxy, and declaring that the "Government of the United States is convinced that the revolution represents the ideals and the will of a majority of the Nicaraguan people more faithfully than does the Government of President Zelaya."† This decisive utterance on the subject of ideals was the political death-warrant of President Zelaya, who promptly laid down his powers and fled. The Nicaraguan Congress then elected a new chief, Dr. Madriz, who by all accounts was in every respect qualified for the post,

Now if the cause of law, tranquillity and peaceful progress were the mainspring of the action of the United States Government, that was the point at which it would have left the destinies of the little republic in the hands of its own competent rulers. The new Constitutional President was animated with the best intentions. The power adequate for their realization was in his hands. His troops had command of every position of importance except the port of Bluefields, where the American Consul was closely watching the vicissitudes of the rebels' army and pleading their seemingly lost cause. The re-establishment of peace was the work of a couple of days. But suddenly a change in the situation was wrought by the arrival of a warship from which United States marines were landed. The first steps taken by the professional sowers of culture was to forbid the forces of the Nicaraguan Government to enter that seaport, whereby they enabled food and supplies to be obtained by the insurgents, who were thus taken under the high protection of the United States. The same device had been employed in Panama and with like results. Not only that, but Yankee freebooters in considerable numbers flocked to the standard of the mutineers and helped to overthrow the Government. An American warship was then chosen as the fittest meeting place for the representatives of the protectors and protected, by whom a noteworthy politico-financial pact was struck up which can be paralleled only by the "deals" of the early

\* Mr. Philander Knox, who unsuccessfully attempted to browbeat Russia into executing his crude designs in Manchuria and elsewhere.

† Extract from the Note dispatched by Mr. Knox on December 1st, 1909.

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European settlers with untutored Indian tribes. Shortly afterwards the modest book-keeper Diaz was raised to the highest post of State by the grateful foreign country to which he had sold his own.

The traitor was loathed by the nation. But his person was effectually protected by marines and bluejackets, of whom over two thousand were let loose upon the population. The armed resistance of the Nicaraguans was so weak that the onslaught of the United States troops received the name of murder, not only from the natives, but also from independent Americans. But whatever may be urged from an ethical viewpoint against this slaughter, which was never alluded to as war, it was eminently successful from the bankers' angle of vision. These enterprising speculators reaped an abundant harvest in a field where they had sown nothing. They had not invested a single dollar in the country. Their plan was to create fortunes out of nothing at all. And with the timely help of the United States marines and the United States Government they succeeded. When the drama began with the thunders fulminated by Mr. Knox, Nicaragua was paying her way. Her entire foreign debt did not exceed half a million pounds sterling, while her assets were very considerable. They included the railways, which were national property, and the customs, which were administered by the State.

But after the "Canal Convention" everything became transformed. Nicaragua was burdened with a debt, which she had not contracted, of well over three million pounds sterling; her finances were administered by a Yankee receiver; her railroads had passed into the hands of American bankers, who not only exploited them, but hauled the white man's burden to the extent of collecting and disbursing the customs and carrying on the business of the National Bank. Bogus claims were advanced by the American financiers, and conventions were drafted and signed by which these claims were "set on a legal basis." The details of these machinations, by which a whole people was hoodwinked, bullied and robbed at once of its substance and its independence, and the consummate dexterity with which the truth was muffled up for European consumption, form a chapter in the world's history which seems to give the lie to optimists and is calculated to fill the cynic with joy. To-day Nicaragua is known in the United States as the

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"Republic of the Bankers Brown Brothers and Co. and J. and W. Seligman."

It is in the dry light of these unsavoury tactics that Latin-Americans have learnt to construe such phrases as "moral uplifting," "setting the sister republics on their legs," "the enlightened practice of civilized nations," "the white man's burden," "the moral duty of superior races," "manifest destiny," the "Monroe Doctrine," and the entire contents of the dictionary of diplomatic phrases, which Latin-Americans liken to the lulling, soothing buzz of blood-sucking mosquitoes.

It is conducive to a complete understanding of the mental workings of the most conscientious of American politicians to compare Mr. Harding's public promises before he became President with his interpretation of them now that he wields the power to redeem them. At Marion he delivered a speech\* in which he said: "I may remark casually . . . that if I should be . . . elected President of this just and honourable Republic, I will not empower an Assistant Secretary of Navy to draft a constitution for helpless neighbours in the West Indies and jam it down their throats at the points of bayonets borne by the United States marines. We have a higher service for our gallant marines than that. Nor will I misuse the power of the Executive to cover with a veil of secrecy repeated acts of unwarranted interference in domestic affairs of the little republics of the Western Hemisphere, such as in the last few years have not only made enemies of those who should be our friends, but have rightfully discredited our country as their trusted neighbour." President Harding knows how to find and touch the responsive chord. He has also found the correct expression: "Rightly discredited our country."

It was with the same strong conviction that Torquemada and his adepts held that they were saving human souls by torturing human bodies and that there was no freedom anywhere outside the intolerant pale within which they lived and worked. Good intentions combined with a false conscience are answerable for more crimes than downright malignity.

The financial bondage which has reduced Nicaragua to the status of a New York Bankers' Colony threatens all Latin-American States. And they are aware of it. It is only a question of time and opportunity. Already the virus of the

\* On August 28th, 1920.

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gold-poison is circulating in the veins of five of these political organisms.\* “Four more, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and Peru, appear to be in process of reduction to the same status.”† It is hardly to be wondered at if capitalism presented in this withering aspect to the Latin-American peoples should engender among them bitter hatred which may one day assume corrosive social forms.

Parenthetically it may not be amiss to note that financial thralldom, as a peaceful substitute for war, is not confined to the American Continent. A joint resolution was laid before Congress in Washington a short time ago,‡ authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to lend five million dollars to the Negro Republic of Liberia on the West Coast of Africa. Mr. Hughes, the able exponent of those moral and spiritual forces for which the nation looks wistfully to the State Department in all its dealings with the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, animadverts superfluously on the solicitude of the United States “for the peaceful development and future advancement of the Negro race.” And the conditions which he attached to this offer of sorely needed financial succour have promoted Liberia to the rank of a colony to be ruled in future by a nominee of the President of the United States. This official is to collect and disburse its revenues, to fix the number of troops and police, both of which are to be officered by Americans, to order such financial laws as he may deem desirable and to employ nearly one-fifth of the revenues in paying the salaries of the American officials. For these services he is to receive a salary larger by twenty-five per cent. than Mr. Hughes’ own, payable by the impecunious nation. And Secretary Hughes, in his resolution, is able, by referring to the new diplomatic nomenclature, to lay due stress upon the solicitude of the United States for Liberia’s “well-being and independence.” The Liberians echo the word independence in a tone which is not that of Secretary Hughes.

Commenting on this arrangement and on the moral obligation which Mr. Hughes declared lay upon the United States to establish it, the *Nation* writes: § “Moral obligation there-

\* Cuba, Panama, Haiti, Nicaragua and Santo Domingo.

† The (New York) *Nation*, June 7th, 1922.

‡ In May, 1922.

§ May 31st, 1922.

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fore there may be ; but incidental to it Mr. Hughes is attempting to impose a most immoral servitude upon the Liberian people. Here, if there ever was one, is a case for the United States to give genuinely disinterested help. That would, under the circumstances, necessarily involve some American supervision of customs. Under the guise of morality, however, to impose upon a tiny African republic a huge loan with no fixed date of termination, which puts the absolute control of the republic for the period of the loan in the hands of an American official—who may well be, as such officials have been in Haiti, a Negro-hating Southerner—and to require that a large part of the loan be used to repay in full claims now in the hands of bankers who bought them far below par—this is a public scandal of which a good church-going Baptist like Mr. Hughes ought to be thoroughly ashamed.”

But the interventionist group of financiers and politicians in New York and Washington have a ready-made formula to fit the case of each of the “sister-republics” which it is scheming to “uplift.” The re-establishment of law and order, the suppression of revolutions, retribution for wrongs inflicted on American fortune-hunters and freebooters, the reorganization of the disordered finances, and generally the elevation of the benighted people to a higher plane of civilization—are among the alleged lofty purposes of these noble-minded men.

What those high-flowing phrases connote the reader can by this time divine. Their meanings differ fundamentally from those which are attached to them in European lands. They are to be interpreted by the Dictionary of Yankee Diplomacy or, better still, by the fruits which they have brought forth.



## CHAPTER XXV

### DIVIDE ET IMPERA

THE American Senate is the depositary of the Monroe Doctrine, which has been aptly termed the national religion of the United States. From that august body emanate on fitting occasions the much needed commentaries on the all-important dogma. Senator McCormick, who is a member of that political College of Cardinals, recently gave it as his conscientious conviction that a right interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine invests the United States with "militant (!) rights down to the Orinoco Basin."\* And, as the publicist to whom he confided this expanding view aptly remarks: "Mr. McCormick's successor may substitute the Amazon for the Orinoco and Senator Some-one-else may feel that our sphere of militancy should not stop short of the Straits of Magellan."

These words echo the dread which comes over Latin Americans whenever they turn their thoughts to foreign relations, and make them wish that an impassable desert sundered them from their apostolic neighbour. Unhappily for themselves their thoughts never harden into helpful acts. Each one insists on standing alone, and eschews the help of its kindred. They recognize that solidarity is at once indispensable and unattainable. And yet, if only they could realize their parlous plight and league themselves together for the peaceful defence of their independence and culture the history of Latin America would run a course very different from that which it is pursuing to-day.

Doubtless formidable obstacles beset the way. But the displacement of obstacles is one of the functions of statecraft.

\* See Mr. Ernest Gruening's masterly article in the (New York) *Nation*, February 22nd, 1922.

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In statecraft, however, the peoples of Central America are uncommonly deficient. For one thing, cohesion, national as well as international, is sadly lacking, and the conception of the race as a homogeneous community possessed of common interests and menaced by common perils has not yet taken root. Each of the five little republics whose fate has been sketched above is a world to itself beyond whose pale dwell aliens who are unto it as the heathen and the publican. Each of them, despite its insignificant population, has its own government and its diplomatic and consular corps, with lucrative posts for the privileged natives. And to abandon these sources of livelihood for the sake of a larger political union would constitute a sacrifice, the advantages of which it is hard to bring home to their selfish or parochial minds.\*

It is fair to confess that this mental attitude is partly to be explained by the isolation to which the geographical conformation of their countries and the want of communications condemn them. In all the five republics, which occupy as large a territory as that of Germany, there are but one thousand five hundred miles covered with railways, and one of the consequences of this deficiency is that it is much easier to pass, say, from the capital of Costa Rica to San Francisco than it is to go from that capital to Punta Arenas, which is situated in Costa Rica and at a relatively short distance from it on the coast. Such geographical barriers to intercourse and association present grave hindrances to the political fusion of which those peoples are so sorely in need.

But the people themselves are greatly to blame. Even imperative necessity and imminent danger did not prevail over their fiery temper and propensity to quarrel. Rather than yield up a little of their sovereignty to a federation of their own race, for the pursuit of their own ends, they sacrificed it all for the benefit of foreign exploiters. One cannot read the history of their many abortive endeavours to form a joint concern without questioning their ripeness for self-government.

Under Spain all five States had been comprised in the Viceroyalty of Guatemala, and when they won their independence their first impulse was to seek political and

\* Guatemala has, in round numbers, 1,840,000 inhabitants; Salvador 1,280,000; Nicaragua 800,000; Honduras about half a million and Costa Rica a little less.

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economic strength in union. But dissension got the better of good sense, and only four out of the five little republics agreed to federate.\* The first acts of the federal State were exemplary. Soon after the union had been proclaimed it abolished slavery, and set an admirable example to Great Britain, the United States and Brazil. But community life was characterized by perpetual squabbles turning upon sordid interests, and was finally dissolved after a duration of fifteen years. Since then the experiment has been several times tried anew in the form of a tripartite union, but it invariably collapsed soon after its birth. The most amazing course struck out during this probationary period was that adopted by a genial but unscrupulous despot who occupied the post of President of Guatemala. When argument and suasion had been thrown away on his foreign colleagues, he had recourse, first to intrigue and then to force, levied a war for union, and lost his life in the first battle.

But even if the geographical conditions and the temper of the people had been favourable to federation, it is doubtful whether the "100 per cent." Senators in Washington would have sat still and inactive while the Spanish-American race was awaking to a sense of its latent capacities, common interests and common danger. The sight of the white man's golden burden would have spurred them to shoulder it. As a matter of fact, the United States never smiled on the labours of those Latin-Americans who sought to knit together in a political organism elements which had been loosely connected by race, language and religion. And if the obstacles to the federation of those little republics were many, the one that proved insuperable came from Washington and New York. The first blow was the deliverance of Cuba from a very primitive aviary into a golden cage. The next was the placing of Nicaragua under the permanent military control of the United States. After this turn of the tide the peoples were disheartened. For the problem had changed radically. Henceforward union among themselves would necessarily involve the protectorate of the United States because of Nicaragua's condition of wardship. But nothing daunted, the leading men once more set their hand to the unpromising task and called a conference to adopt measures for its execution. After much heated dis-

\* Costa Rica declined to enter the federation.

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cussion they got to the point of drafting an Act of Federation,\* which at first seemed likely to be agreed to. But Nicaragua dissented. That republic is in the hands of a family named Chamorro, which is hand in glove with the company of uplifters in New York and Washington, and is consequently all powerful in its own country. Nicaragua therefore refused to sign the Act unless the other four republics would give their full assent to her treaty with the United States. That meant that they too would accept for themselves the tutelage to which she is reduced. And they naturally shrank from thus jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. Costa Rica next withdrew from the combination, whereupon the remaining three States stood to their guns and federated.

This new tripartite union was looked upon askant by those vigilant watchmen who in such matters direct the public affairs of the United States, and was therefore doomed to dissolution. The lever by which the brand-new structure was dismantled was Guatemala.

Now Guatemala was perhaps the most unfortunate of all those little republics. Over and over again her domestic affairs had been abominably mismanaged. At one time a swineherd named Rafael Carrera, with the help of the clergy, managed to obtain the post of President, which he soon changed to that of Dictator, and for a quarter of a century he misgoverned the republic, behaving like a malignant maniac.† After a considerable lapse of time‡ another brutal chief, named Cabrera, forced his way into power. This miscreant maintained himself there for twenty-two years of a reign of terror, until, loathed and execrated by nearly all except his tools, he was deposed and thrust out of office by a Coalition of both parties.

I was in Guatemala during the elections that ensued on this act of justice,§ and I stood at some of the polling booths and chatted with the voters. They were all glad to be rid of the monster who had terrorized his fellow-citizens and had displayed friendly feelings only for the politicians of the United States. The bulk of the voters elected to the presidency

\* In January, 1921.

† From the year 1840 until 1865.

‡ In the year 1898.

§ On August 29th, 1920.

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Señor Herrera, a competent, law-abiding man, who was more solicitous about his own country and race than about the interests of foreign intriguers. In the eyes of the latter he was further guilty of upholding the Central American Union, and of cherishing friendly sentiments towards Mexico, and in particular towards the Mexican President-elect, General Obregón. And these being mortal sins, Herrera's troubles began at once.

Now the deposed Dictator had some devoted partisans left in the country, who became the instruments of retribution. One of them, named Orellana, hatched a plot, found abettors of influence and rose in arms against the Government. A hopeless enterprise this might seem, because President Wilson had announced that no chief of a republic who was borne to power on the crest of a revolutionary wave would be recognized by the United States, and also because rebellion against the Government of any member of the newly-formed Central American Union was tantamount to rebellion against the Union itself, and was therefore liable to be suppressed by the combined forces of all three. But misgivings on this score were quickly dispelled, if ever they were entertained. For as soon as the rebellion broke out the United States intervened in the cause of peace and of the rebels. A note was dispatched to the Governments of Salvador and Honduras, practically forbidding them to go to Herrera's assistance. This was decisive. The constitutional President was ousted, the usurper seated in the presidential arm-chair, and President Harding was eulogized in his own country for thus promptly "hindering bloodshed and strife."

The immediate effects of this action are worthy of note. Orellana withdrew from the Central American Union, had its flag hauled down, and within four months received the blessing of the United States in the welcome form of official recognition. On the other hand, Mexico's President—the most competent statesman that Republic has ever yet had—has been conscientiously boycotted by the United States for well nigh two years because he refuses to violate the Constitution of his country and coerce his people with the help of foreign marines. Mexico has been told that if she would put in office a man of the type of Adolfo Diaz, Dartiguenave or Orellana, Yankees and Mexicans could dwell together like the wolf and the lamb

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of Isaiah and the little child from Washington might lead them. Between the ways of Providence and those of Washington Latin-Americans discern this difference, that whereas they both work to evolve order out of chaos, the latter creates the raw stuff wherever it is lacking. In other respects the ways of both are equally inscrutable.

The collapse of the Central American Union, and more especially the way in which it was effected, caused a deep impression in Mexico. The duty of refusing recognition to Orellana was openly preached there, and the tide of public feeling began to flow with ominous force. On this occasion Obregón set a striking example of good judgment and tact. To those who maintained that Orellana was a marplot and a usurper, and should be treated as such, he replied that official recognition does not carry with it any judgment upon the ethics of the State-stroke, but is merely a tribute of respect due to the sovereignty of an independent State, and that it would ill become the Mexican Republic to put upon a weaker community the pressure which it resents on the part of more powerful nations. All that one State can reasonably require of another is a reasonable guarantee for its nationals, and neighbourly relations generally. Furthermore, Guatemala must not be forsaken by its own kith and kin and thrown into the arms of strangers in its hour of need. The balkanization of Latin America, he concluded, would be an irremediable calamity to which Mexico should not contribute by commission or omission. The outcome of this sensible view was the recognition of Orellana.

Thus the destiny of the Indo-American peoples as a whole has been a veritable tragedy from the fateful day on which they first came into contact with the European civilizer and watched him spreading lust and cruelty broadcast through the land. During the ensuing four centuries they were considered and treated as children or as slaves in the name of those religious and moral principles which impart nobility and grandeur to human nature. On regaining their independence the political new-birth of those nearest to the United States revealed itself as little more than "a sleep and a forgetting." Like the orb of day in a late Arctic autumn their life-star set almost as soon as it rose. For, living side by side with the mightiest people of the future, encompassed by dangers more

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insidious than any which ever before threatened a nation or a race, they seem never to have understood the parlous conditions in which circumstances placed them. At any rate, they failed to strike out a line of conduct so adjusted to those conditions as to preserve their political sovereignty or their racial individuality intact and untainted. Some of them were drawn or driven into the orbit of the great Republic, where they now revolve as satellites. Those of their leaders whom Nature had endowed with political vision, marred by optimism, clung to the soothing belief that justice, which lives and works in the subterranean gloom of the roots of things, would one day make itself felt and seen without any efforts of their own. Had not condign retribution overtaken Spain at last in spite of the overwhelming might with which she intervened of yore in the concerns of two continents and bade fair to shape the destinies of the world? Anyhow, in the eyes of the various native actors who moved into the political foreground of Latin America, to vanish in a twinkling, leaving smoke and blood behind, there was no such entity as a Latin American race, nor anything nobler to work for than their own personal interests or at best the welfare of their particular country. And as a result of this deplorable want of solidarity the races of Central and South America are now confronted with the fate which has already submerged the aborigines of Africa, all of whom, excepting the Abyssinians, have fallen under the sway of European guardians, who are bringing them up as props of political and social systems which they abhor.

Few natives of Latin America have as yet clearly perceived this danger. Fewer still have understood how alone it might be encountered with success, if indeed there still be time to conjure it away—for as nations have sown they must reap. And among these rare, superior spirits, Alvaro Obregón occupies a unique place.

Circumstance has made the Latin-American people as dependent upon each other for the maintenance of their political sovereignty, their racial customs, their language—in a word, of every attribute which they prize as nations and as individuals—as are the various racial elements of which the Swiss State is composed. But to-day they resemble the Poles on the eve of the first partition of their country, on whom a common danger had vainly inculcated the pressing need of union, and

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whom shortsightedness combined with petty ambition and sordid venality tempted and lured to the furtherance of the disintegration and ruin of their country.

An amazing system of aloofness characterizes the attitude of the Latin-American States towards each other in their dealings with their English-speaking neighbour. Those republics may aptly be likened to the companions of Ulysses in the cave of Polyphemus, each one sullenly waiting for his own turn to be devoured, but hoping for some *deus ex machina* to save him. In vain ardent lovers of their race and culture have striven to bring home to the minds of the ruling classes the conviction that the interests of each are the interests of all, that the dangers that menace them have one and the same source and that their enemies are militarily and financially all-powerful. In after-dinner speeches they are all seers, workers and warriors. But, being mostly phrase-weavers and word-worshippers, their rhetoric consists of bubbles and foam.

The communities of Latin America have been warned over and over again by concrete examples of what is in store for them. But experience tells us that peoples and governments never learn aught from history nor act according to its teachings.

If only an apostle of racial solidarity were to arise, preach the gospel of solidarity and co-operation and put heart into these peoples, it is conceivable that the cause might yet be won or the day of doom postponed. If even a powerful association, after the manner, say, of the Dante Society in Italy, were formed and directed by strong, purposeful men like President Obregón and ex-President Irigoyen of the Argentine Republic, there would still be hope. But with things as they now are, the poisonous doctrine of the duties of superior towards "inferior" nations is fast taking root and spreading.

It is safe to say that one of the differences between a superior and an "inferior" race lies partly in the ability of the former to discern the nature of its surroundings, to perceive the perils which these conceal and to cope with them manfully—and in the slowness of the latter to perceive the gathering clouds and brewing storms and to make ready for the impending outburst. And judged by this standard the Latin-Americans are indeed far from being a match for their English-speaking neighbours.



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There is no fixed type of Spanish-American. Each republic presents us with a variety of ethnic blends which will continue to bewilder the student until the process of race fusion, now in full swing, has been completed. The sweeping generalizations which abound in the Press of the United States are therefore as misleading as are the narratives and interpretations of current events which that Press sets before its readers. The Spanish-American, as depicted by most North American publicists, whether he belong to the South or the Centre, is usually a sorry caricature. If the picture offered even a tolerable approximation to reality it would leave unexplained and enigmatical the remarkable progress made by some republics, which are tranquil, orderly, cultured and prosperous.

Whatever the defects of Spanish-Americans—and they are neither few nor venial—their qualities, as revealed in literature, art and science, are such as, if duly cultivated, will win for them an enviable place among the progressive races of the world. Although it is rash to generalize, it is fairly safe to say that, quick of apprehension, lovers of the beautiful, with a fine sense for the æsthetical, generous, imaginative and resourceful, they are sworn foes to hypocrisy and, like the Russians, are capable of offering up the most painful sacrifices at the shrine of their ideals. Indeed, it is conceivable that their country may yet become one of the main sources of the æsthetic leaven from which the entire Continent will one day draw its supplies. Proud of their traditions and responsive to their inherited instincts, they decline to bend the knee before the golden calf, and in assimilating what appeals to them of the new spirit of the age they display a nice sense of measure which is rare among the other races of the world.

The defects of their qualities, which their English-speaking neighbour is prone to overdraw, are most clearly noticeable in the realm of politics, where they have played havoc with vital interests of the great community to which they all belong. The Spanish-Americans are individualistic to a degree, matched only by the Poles and the Chinese, shallow of vision and wanting in public spirit. What befalls their kindred in other republics, even when the outcome is calculated to jeopardize the permanent interests of their own, is no concern of theirs. The amazing inaction which they exhibited during the ordeals to which their brethren in other States have at various times

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been subjected, and to which some of the onlookers have since succumbed, is a consequence of their habit of placing themselves outside the pale of their larger community.

Steady, plodding industry, silent composure and patient reserve are not among the racial traits of their governing classes. These groups are better known for their lively impetuosity and restless animation. Some of those drawbacks are doubtless to be ascribed in part to the climate, which is apt to relax moral as well as physical fibre, slacken purpose, disturb balance of judgment and foster fitfulness. Brought up in the worship of form they yield readily to the musical vibrations of sonorous Castilian oratory, prefer a fine turn of phrase, a polished epigram or a winged word to a forcible argument, and adore that mastery in the art of expression which imparts definite articulation to emotion and passion. Hence the mutability of their ideals and the hollowness of their rhetoric.

The noble sentiments which the Press of the various Latin-American republics are constantly invoking, like the eloquent tributes which they lavish on justice, right, humanity, seldom have a counterpart in the realities of their national life. All those republics, with the exception of the great Argentine State, under its distinguished President Irigoyen, remained inactive and indifferent onlookers at the inroads on the sovereignty, the invasions of the territory, the annexations of large provinces and the financial and economic subjection of their sister nations, although these encroachments were obviously conceived as the first steps towards the enthrallment of their own. Mexico, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Colombia, Nicaragua, and quite lately, even Bolivia and Peru, have all suffered in one or other of these ways at the hands of the various Governments of the United States, whose trespassing called forth no solemn protest, awakened no misgivings.

The query : "Am I my brother's keeper?" expressed the attitude of each of the communities whose own destiny was thus being shadowed forth by the overlords of the American Continent. For the latter, as we have seen, there is no justice, no plain dealing, no responsibility before history, no law. There may be Hague Tribunals and Leagues of Nations for all other political organisms on the globe, but there is no international court to which the politicians of the United States are willing to submit their opportunely picked quarrels with their Latin-

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American neighbours. Not to have uttered a joint protest against this crying injustice, which all members of Latin America will ultimately and irremediably experience, is an indelible blot on the scutcheon of the race. "Had I not supplied the wood for the handle of the axe," cried the forest, "my trees would never have been felled."

Latin America bids fair to be transformed in time by various influences, and especially by the enigmatical Monroe Doctrine, which ignores diplomatic precedents and defies all law, into a sort of vast ethnic artichoke, the leaves of which will be torn off one by one in order to provide food for the supnation. It is a broad application of the doctrine of Nietzsche. By means of Monroe's expanded principle, dissolvent in its latter-day developments, a category of so-called inferior races and backward nations has been created—a proletariat of peoples, in a word—which may be dealt with in summary and arbitrary fashion, partially enthralled or wholly suppressed, and the transaction cloaked in the disguise of humanitarianism.

The political wirepullers, financial scheme-weavers and administrative bludgeon-men whose names are become by-words in the Caribbean republics, and not only there, are sometimes quite successful in posing among their own fellow-citizens as missionaries of culture, sowers of the good seed and benefactors of the human race. And many of the most exalted in the land are victims of the fraud and succumb to the spell. One result is the hashish of self-glorification which has become a recognized element of popular education in the United States. Even sober-minded men, who are inaccessible to personal adulation, will welcome the incense offered to the community of which they happen to be members. President Harding publicly told the American people that if all nations were like unto the United States there would be no more wars upon earth. But the incentive of imitation thus seductively held out to the "inferior" races of the world has not yet wrought the wished-for effect. Several of these peoples persist in regarding the civilization of the United States as a cornfield from which the blue flower of culture is weeded out in order to make room for the growth of the daily bread.

## CHAPTER XXVI

“MEDICE, CURA TE IPSUM”

THE more closely one studies the many occasions on which American politicians and financiers have intervened in the affairs of their weaker neighbours for the alleged purpose of uplifting them morally and economically, the deeper and more firmly set is one's scepticism as to their special fitness for this delicate, responsible, and in most cases supererogatory task. Indeed, one may hazard the opinion that almost any European State, owing to its warmer sympathy with the Latin-American temper, would be more likely to obtain positive results.

The Yankee politician, who is nowise typical of the American people, is above all things else a human termite, a practical “hustler,” who lives and works in mechanical, wealth-creating, realm-expanding surroundings, and his nature is subdued to what it works in. Unhappily his occupation offers little scope for spiritual aspirations, in which he is often deficient. His sense of human dignity is deadened by engrafted national pride, and his prejudices keep him from recognizing the specific human worth of other peoples, whom he is prone to label “inferior” and treats as ethnic manure. There is no more baleful fallacy in the dealings of State with State and people with people than this theory as applied on the other side of the Atlantic, nor is there any more corrosive policy than that of indoctrinating the English-speaking community of the American Continent with the belief that they are the chosen people, the salt of the earth, the heaven-appointed guardians of the sacred fire. This elementary truth is abundantly illustrated by the recent dealings of the United States with their nearest Latin-American neighbours.

In Haiti, where Americans have now been operating for nearly seven years, the state of the country and the people

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is very much worse than was their alleged condition when the invasion first took place. According to published accounts and detailed narratives the machinery of government has been put out of gear, the laws, traditions and customs have been brought into contempt, moral and legal restraints have been swept away, and crime of various kinds has been included in the pharmacopœia of the moral physicians. Bloodshed and repression go hand in hand with "brotherhood and peace," and at various periods the relations between the two races have been simplified by their reduction to those of hares and hounds in the hunting season.

What Latin-Americans discern in this peculiar process is the supremacy of might over right and the employment of hypocrisy to disguise it. The United States, they feel, might be a shining example to the world, might be to its neighbours the Mentor it aspires to be, had the policy of its Government been adjusted to the sentiments of its people. But it has become something very different. The circumstance that its agents in neighbouring countries are men whose type of character and procedure are at variance with the work which they ostensibly set out to perform is indeed a grievous misfortune, but not necessarily the consequence of a vice. It might be the result of an error of judgment. But when the Central Government itself repudiates its solemn obligations and refuses to redeem its plighted word, then average people find it hard to believe that it is qualified for the mission of leading backward races along the road of progress.

The treaty which the United States Government drafted and imposed upon Haiti was, as we saw, contemptuously set aside by itself as well as by its agents. Every effort to have it carried out was angrily thwarted by both. And this was no isolated instance. It is a rooted habit which causes the "inferior" races to ask whether compacts and covenants are binding only on them.

Take another flagrant case. The United States secured by admittedly disingenuous means from Nicaragua certain provinces on the Gulf of Fonseca. At that time Nicaragua had not these provinces in her gift. She was ceding something which partly belonged to her neighbours. Thereupon these neighbours\* brought suit against Nicaragua, and chose a

\* Costa Rica and Salvador.

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tribunal that had been set up before at the instance of the United States.\* The United States, therefore, had inferentially bound itself to accept that tribunal's award. But when its decision was promulgated it was disdainfully ignored by the Washington Government. One can readily understand the effects of such behaviour on the “ inferior ” races.

In the story of America's dealings with the Indians of her own territory one encounters the same reprehensible laxity. As recently as August, 1922, the Indian Rights Association notified to the United States Government and the country that whereas by the terms of the existing treaty a schoolhouse and a teacher have to be maintained for every thirty Indian children, there are at present over six thousand Navajo children who have neither, and about twenty-one thousand children of all Indian tribes who are unprovided with those educational opportunities without which they cannot rise to a place corresponding to their capacities in the country which was once their own.

This failure to redeem solemn pledges to people who are powerless to enforce their fulfilment creates an unfavourable impression. Nowadays one ought not to be able to say of any responsible politician what Landor wrote of a successful Minister :

“ Three things are requisite on occasion : to speak like an honest man, to act like a dishonest one, and to be indifferent which you are called.”

It was surely something very remote from this that President Harding had in mind when he uttered his famous boast. But unfortunately it is what many a Latin-American calls to mind when he sees dollar diplomacy, expeditionary forces and a reign of terror employed as instruments of moral regeneration.

The stereotyped process of Americanization is marked everywhere by the same stages : first, revolutions and rumours of revolutions, accompanied by a Press campaign against the violence and disorder of the foredoomed republic. Then invasion, prompted by praiseworthy solicitude for the prevention of bloodshed, accompanied with profuse blood-letting by the marines for a moral purpose. The next stadium is a reign of wholesome terror, followed by the weaving of tough

\* In October, 1907.

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financial bonds, the readjustment of the Constitution and legislation by the Washington State Department, after which the process winds up with the subjection of the inferior sister to the Yankee Republic.

Those bonds are not merely strong, but also sacred. They are included among the unquestionable data of the universal scheme of things, like the Doctrine of Mr. Monroe, never again to be questioned, still less modified, by any international tribunal or other human authority. They become an integral part of the political religion of the United States, and are more firmly established there than any Church dogma. Among the people, Dr. Elliot tells us, the Monroe Doctrine is a religion. Monroe is virtually a sort of divinity and the Washington politicians are his prophets. The latter continue to receive new light about the meaning of the Doctrine when changing circumstances require it. For the more a theory is spread over time and space the more elastic it grows.

The late Senator Platt was one of the Monrovia prophets whom the spirit moved. It was he who, in virtue of an amendment that still bears his name, emasculated Cuba, and had that island drawn permanently into the orbit of the United States. Another member of the privileged order is Senator Fall, who, seemingly devoid of side-lights, wove a web in which to entangle Mexico. But that republic has contrived so far to retain its independence. This politician went about with what is termed a mud-rake and gathered together all the crimes committed by Mexicans during a considerable period of years, entered them carefully in a list, and presented the nosegay to his countrymen as proof positive that the process of "cleaning up" was peremptorily called for.

Now that was a dangerous precedent. It is true that some of the misdeeds held up to obloquy were indeed almost as savage as those perpetrated in Europe during the world-war. But it is unfortunately an indisputable fact that most of them might have been paralleled in the territory of the United States during the same lapse of time and all of them were outdone by the horrors perpetrated in Haiti and Santo Domingo by marines of the United States in the course of moralizing those republics. The war of recriminations thus wantonly provoked could therefore lead nowhither except to mutual acrimony and estrangement. The holding up of trains in Texas and

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Arkansas; the use of gas bombs by train bandits;\* the lynchings of the coloured population in Georgia;† attacks on postal vans in New York;‡ disguised slavery in Georgia and other southern States;§ the series of eleven “major mail robberies in the Middle West in ten months,|| which amounted to \$6,801,750;¶ the inhuman treatment of alien immigrants on Ellis Island,<sup>1</sup> and the killing of some two hundred coloured men, women and children in Tulsa”<sup>2</sup>—were pointed

\* See the (London) *Times*, September 9th, 1921.

† The New York *Evening Post*, April 28th, 1921. Governor Dorsey writes: “In some counties the negro is being driven out as though he were a wild beast; in others he is being held as a slave; in others no negroes remain.” This governor’s booklet is to some extent an offset against much that has appeared in Mr. Fall’s indictment against Mexico. True, two blacks do not make a white. But it is hardly becoming in the pot to call the kettle black.

‡ See the New York *Herald*, October 30th, 1921.

§ See the New York *Times*, May 1st, 1921, and Governor Dorsey’s booklet.

|| New York *Herald*, April 8th, 1921.

¶ *Ibidem*.

<sup>1</sup> See the report of Mr. Harry Schlacht, head of the Welfare Bureau at Ellis Island, to the Department of Labour, in which he states that “after a year of personal investigation he finds that the immigration station at New York harbour is utterly unfit for the purpose it was intended to serve. Aliens, men, women and children, are treated more like cattle than human beings, and the conditions on Ellis Island resemble those of a prison rather than of a place of welcome through which passes the future manhood and womanhood of America. . . . The detention quarters are inadequate, filthy and insanitary, and a disgrace to the United States. The unfortunate immigrants are herded, cuffed, kicked, underfed, robbed and forced to sleep in wooden bunks without bedding or pillows. Soap and towels are never supplied. Young girls are exposed to dangers and pitfalls—‘moral traps illuminated by the bright reflection of the official badge that overawes the ignorant and the credulous.’” Cf. the London *Daily Telegraph*, 22nd August, 1921. And now read the following account of how a Latin-American State, the Argentine Republic, welcomes foreign settlers. The *Bulletin* of the Pan-American Union writes: “An hotel with rooms for 6,000 ‘guests,’ a scientific kitchen, scrupulously clean, in which is prepared plenty of good food, immaculate dormitories for men and women, a whole corridor of bathrooms with hot and cold water, baths required twice a week, moving pictures of Argentina’s opportunities, hospital service, special maternity wards, and gardens open to the ‘hotel guests.’” Cf. the New York *Nation*, December 14th, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> See the New York *Nation*, June 29th, 1921, which summarizes the event as follows: “An hysterical white girl related that a nineteen-year-old coloured boy attempted to assault her in the public elevator of a public office building of a thriving town of 100,000 in open daylight. Without pausing to find whether or not the story was true, without bothering with the slight detail of investigating the character of the woman who made the outcry (as a matter of fact she was of exceedingly doubtful reputation), a mob of 100 per cent. Americans set forth on a wild rampage that cost the lives of fifty white men; of between 150 and 200 coloured men, women and children; the destruction by fire of \$1,500,000 worth of property; the looting of many homes, and everlasting damage to the reputation of the city of Tulsa and the State of Oklahoma.”



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to as specimens of what goes on in a republic which claims to lead the civilized world. And it was pertinently remarked that in the case of the English-speaking Republic there was no revolutionary frenzy to extenuate the criminal acts. They were all committed in a period of peace, prosperity and "normalcy."

When in the face of these enormities President Harding publicly thanks God that Americans are not as other nations are, his neighbours may be excused if they suggest that his thanks are being tendered at a wrong address. And when he said to the Delegates of the Washington Conference :

"We harbour no fears. We have no sordid ends to serve. We suspect no enemy. We contemplate or apprehend no conquest. Content with what we have, we seek nothing which is another's."—Latin-Americans irreverently observed that these phrases are couched in the language of the new diplomacy, in which invasion, bombardment and battles are not termed war, but only moral uplifting, an ultimatum is called friendly advice, and a tariff calculated to paralyse European commerce and industry is classified as a domestic affair of the United States Government.

What veracious history teaches, differs from President Harding's reading of it. The North American Republic, like all world-Powers, is actuated by predatory instincts and a set tendency to expansion. This drift has been intensified and made deliberate by education and training. Even the children of the immigrant inhale its spirit with their first breath of consciousness, together with that peculiar patriotism which is personal in its passionateness and theological in its intolerance. The people's sense of awe and wonder is diverted from spiritual and moral regions to the worship of their own country, which is exclusive and almost idolatrous. Ignorant of history and contemptuous of tradition, the Yankee regards the planet as his rightful field of enterprise and resents as intolerable injustice all foreign legislation which restricts his liberty to exploit it.

At first their expansion was restricted to the new Continent and their methods to military force and diplomatic astuteness. To-day their interests are rooted in every quarter of the globe. Having thus become a world-Power, possessed of the lion's share of the world's gold, they see their way to substitute dollars for guns and shirt-sleeve diplomacy for war. And they take

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this blessed innovation as Gideon took the dew on his fleece of wool for a sign that the Deity is with them.

This description applies to the ruling section of the Republic. The bulk of the population is naturally fair-minded, humane and generous. Symptoms of its noble character are the kindly deeds associated with its name in famishing Austria, Russia, Germany, Armenia.

The group of politicians and financiers who shape the international intercourse of the Republic cannot be said to represent the people. Neither do they consult it. President Polk, as we saw, deceived it deliberately. Official censors and unofficial Pressmen hoodwink it. The public was systematically kept in the dark respecting the crimes of the marines in Haiti, Santo Domingo and elsewhere. It is unaware of the vast conspiracies that are still being hatched against Mexico and other Spanish-American States by Yankee millionaires, who, having drawn their millions from those countries, are employing part of this wealth to rob them of their liberties. The hundred hands of this modern Briareus keep the columns of the newspapers and the offices of publishers closed to articles and books which would dissipate the ignorance of the masses on these topics. And not one of those ubiquitous hands has anywhere touched or approached the domain of morality. Military officers in Mexico are tempted to betray their country for large cheques on New York banks. Civil servants are bribed to sell State secrets and confidential documents. Clerks and old retainers receive alluring offers to become eavesdroppers and spies. And demoralization spreads in a broad dissolvent stream over the Mexican and the other Latin-American republics.

The North American democracy being itself ruled by gold, it is by gold that it seeks to sway the world. The ancient Romans were also continually attracted by the same goal, but in the beginning their motives were refined with moral and transcendental ideals. The achievements of the official Yankee, on the other hand, lie in the material sphere. What he touches he mechanizes. His creations, like the automaton of Vaucanson and the Frankenstein monster, lack a soul. Cuba is an example.

The world's greatest democracy is in fact a plutocracy. Gold is the great classifier, the standard measure of worth. Capitalism is embodied in more odious forms than in the days when Julia Maesa in Rome bought the throne for her grandson,

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Heliogabalus, or in Germany, where, centuries later, one of the wealthy merchant princes of Augsburg\* wrote to the Emperor Charles V. :

“Everybody knows that it was only through me that you became Emperor.”

“At the present time,” writes the First Deputy Commissioner of Accounts of the City of New York, † “all industry is controlled by a few and the ambition of the small man is checked. . . . The bulk of the excessive private fortunes now is in the hands of the second, third and fourth generations. Many of the heirs are persons of immature years. Others are aged widows and spinsters, loaded down with riches, but with no capacity to use their riches for good.”‡ But among those who have a decided capacity to use their gold to some purpose are not a few who confound evil with good and contribute their share to the organizing of rebellions, the downfall of republics and the Americanization of Indo-Latin races, which is the first step towards the domination of the world.

\* The celebrated Fugger.

† In his remarkable book entitled “Dynastic America.”

‡ Henry Ford’s fortune is computed at two thousand million dollars ; John Rockefeller’s at two thousand five hundred millions ; those of Vanderbilt, Guggenheim, Du Pont and Astor at five hundred millions each ; those of Mellon, Pratt and Weyerhaeuser at three hundred millions each ; that of Harkness at four hundred millions, and so on. The rich two per cent. of the people, according to Mr. Klein, own sixty per cent. of the wealth of the United States.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### OBREGÓN'S WORLD SIGNIFICANCE

OBREGÓN'S resolve to have recourse to moral methods to save his country from the avalanche that was threatening to descend upon it marks the line of cleavage between himself and his immediate predecessor, and indeed between himself and all contemporary statesmen. Carranza was for encountering the adversary with his own weapons—military force and diplomatic intrigue. With this object in view he would have brought Mexico into the world-war on the side of Germany if Obregón had not set his face against any foreign adventure. The same motive impelled Carranza to seek close co-operation with all South American peoples, but co-operation whose ultimate and thinly disguised aim was hostility to the United States.

And therein lurked one of the capital errors of his statecraft.

Obregón's diagnosis and method were different. He began by laying bare the taproot of the evil which must be eradicated if his country and its southern neighbours were to live their own lives unshackled and fulfil their mission. Its fountain-head, he maintained, was not the United States, but diseased humanity itself. It might be compared to Yggdrasil, the ash-tree of Scandinavian mythology which overshadows the entire world. Military force and political alliances, far from affording requisite protection, would but intensify the danger and aggravate the catastrophe. Before he became President he put forward the following formula, to which his policy, domestic and foreign, has since been rigorously adjusted :

"To-day a large part of the world is a heap of mouldering ruins. Organic disorder has set in, even among some of the progressive nations, and is fast spreading. Two currents, unequal in force, are struggling for the mastery: might and

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morality. If the former triumphs Mexico and the Latin-American race have nothing to hope. If the latter we have nothing to fear, because morality is our own free choice."

To that choice he was led by a thorough study of the elements of the problem and by close contact with men and things, illumined by rare intuition. For to have undergone much does not necessarily imply experience. Something more, a quality that is innate, not acquired, is indispensable. In this respect a man's past may be compared to a rock which must be struck with superior intelligence, as with a magician's wand, before the water of wisdom will flow from it. And Obregón is imbued with that intelligence, and his momentous experiment is one of its fruits.

The Mexican statesman's ideas were started on the purely practical side. He beheld his countrymen undergoing a twofold oppression: by their own ignorance and by the callous egotism of foreign profit hunters and politicians. The revolutions and lawlessness which ensued hindered progress and were strangling the nation. A country lacerated by civil war cannot contribute to the world's welfare and must end by forfeiting its right to exist as a separate entity. The first step towards the rescue and reconstruction of Mexico then was to put an end to bloodshed by removing the injustice born of ignorance which caused it. And that step Obregón took.

Having pacified the country he set about abolishing privilege and giving an equal opportunity to all citizens to develop their capacities for the benefit of the community, and proclaimed the necessity of applying the same treatment to the members of the larger community of mankind.

When Obregón became President of the Republic the fortunes of Mexico, as the reader has seen, were at their lowest ebb. Military intervention by the United States was a foregone conclusion. Several subservient candidates for the presidency, backed by Yankee millionaires and Mexican Conservatives, were ready to earn foreign support by pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for all the vested interests concerned. Plans were talked of for the absorption of the Naboth's vineyard of Lower California; velleities were cherished for the annexation of Sonora and a draft of the fatal treaty of "amity and commerce" was indited and kept in readiness for presentation, which would have bound the Republic to the United States for all time.

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Instead of entangling himself in the details of national problems Obregón took a stand which entitled him to a hearing from the whole civilized world. He proclaimed the solidarity of mankind, based upon morality and quickened with a lively faith in the perfectibility of the human race. Unhappily the spectacle that unfolds itself to our eyes at present is hardly calculated to fortify that faith. But humanity, like the ocean, has its periods of ebb and flow, and if the former is at its lowest to-day the return of the latter cannot be far off. Mexicans, Latin-Americans and all the "inferior races," as members of the larger body, can expect the conditions which they need for healthy development only if the whole organism definitively shakes off the malady that is undermining it.

Analysing the origins of the world-evil, Obregón traces revolutions and wars, which are but some of its more acute symptoms, to ignorance: negative ignorance, which is lack of instruction, and positive ignorance, which is the sinister result of systematic inculcation of wrong ideas and immoral principles. And this latter is the most malignant blight which cultured nations have ever brought down upon themselves. On this subject, having thought much, he feels strongly.

He asked whether if the peoples who tore each other to pieces for over four years had realized that their mad struggle could solve none of their problems, redress none of their grievances, but only create new ones, would they have gone into it as blithely as they did? To-day they know that the war which shattered thrones, overturned empires, displaced frontiers, condemned millions to death and other millions to misery—settled nothing. But it has pointed a lesson, and in spite of the fierce hates which were awakened and fostered by those years of slaughter, the nations and races of the globe are still being insensibly drawn towards each other by a mysterious force which ignores those fratricidal crimes. But the distance between them is greater than it was.

If the members of the human family were acquainted with each other, their attitude towards war would undergo a wholesome change. To-day they are estranged. In some countries the inhabitants of one province look upon those of another with the same distrust or dislike with which the Spartan Greeks regarded the Greeks of Attica. A century has not elapsed since the Italian leaders could say to the inhabitants of Bologna,

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when the foreigner was advancing: "Bolognese! The cause of the Modenese is not our cause."

An amusing illustration of the lengths to which even educated peoples are ignorant of the psychology of their neighbours occurred in New York during the visit of Marshal Joffre and M. Viviani to the United States. In honour of the illustrious French guests a banquet was given, at which most of the prominent personages of the country were present. It was understood that the relations of MM. Viviani and Joffre at the time were cold, not to say tense, and appearances seemed to confirm the rumour. At table they sat opposite each other, one on each side of the Mayor. During their post-prandial discourses the countenance of each was curiously scanned, for as they spoke in French their words were understood by few.

M. Viviani, in the course of his eloquent address, unexpectedly paid such a handsome compliment to the Marshal that the latter, moved to the depths, sprang from his seat with glowing eyes and outstretched arms, and darting behind the Mayor's chair, rushed up to the orator to hug and kiss him. But the Mayor, unaware of these exotic habits, also rose from his seat, and intercepting Viviani, exclaimed: "No, gentlemen. Please. No quarrelling. Here we are all friends."

Obregón holds that the cure for this kind of ignorance is intercourse, and before he had become President he issued invitations to large bodies of Americans to visit Mexico as it is, to study the people as they are in their everyday life with their good qualities and defects, and then to say whether they did not feel with the Psalmist when he sang: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in amity," instead of cutting each other's throats. And the Mexican Government, despite the scarcity of its resources, bore the expense of those excursions.

And of all the deeds of those Yankee "friends of Mexico" who are constantly plotting to "uplift" her, probably none reveals the real spirit that actuates them in all its repulsiveness more clearly than their deliberate and persistent efforts to keep their fellow countrymen from accepting that hospitable invitation. Two influential bodies who boast that they are "true friends of Mexico" strongly advised American merchants not to accept any invitation to go to Mexico, "nor to participate in any friendly meetings with the Mexican Govern-

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ment or the *Mexican people* until all the points in the programme of that Association as preliminary conditions for the recognition of Obregón's Government have been accepted."\*

But Obregón, persevering in his resolve, had the satisfaction of extending Mexican hospitality to thousands of open-minded Americans, and of learning that the impressions which they received in his country were exactly those which he had anticipated. Guests and hosts mingled, conversed and felt drawn towards each other, and the former returned to their homes preaching peace on the American Continent and good will among men there. And all over the United States the population is coming to abhor every intrigue, political and capitalistic, which has for its object or its outcome the sowing of dissension between the sister republics. Obregón has sent a number of Mexican youths to study in the various high schools of the northern Republic, and made arrangements for the reception of American students in Mexico, and he is applying the same system to the principal countries of Europe.

When we come to consider Obregón's ideas about the second kind of ignorance—that which is deliberately engrafted on the receptive minds of the young by those who assume and abuse the office of educators—we feel the full breath of the new spirit in all its bracing vigour. These views, repeatedly put forward in various shapes, and with a variety of apt illustrations,† may be summarily paraphrased as follows :

If history is not, as Voltaire described it, a conventional fiction, it is often very much worse. It is a means of instilling hatred, rancour and what Schopenhauer termed the cheapest kind of pride—national pride—in the souls of the rising generation. The history of a nation is frequently little better than hero-worship of the grossest kind, apotheosizing mortals who lacked integrity, veracity and respect for humanity simply because circumstance associated them with memorable achievements. It is no exaggeration to say that some of the portraits idealized by national historians have wrought more evil in the world than their models.

The great reputations of some "historical" personages when exposed to the light of scientific research fall to dust like ancient Egyptian papyri. Not a few of the principal actors

\* *El Universal*, March 9th, 1921.

† For the historical illustrations in this chapter I alone am responsible.



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in the grand drama of the French Revolution, for instance, shrivel and shrink in the critical pages of M. Aulard to the moral size and shape of criminals whose occupations changed with circumstances, but whose characters remained impressible to the same order of motives as at the outset. The real motive which prompted Napoleon's military intervention in Switzerland was to get hold of the State Treasury in Bern, which he needed in order to rig out his Egyptian Expedition.

Going further back history presents us with a sequence of similar spectacles. No credulous reader of the current version of the Thirty Years War will grudge his tribute of admiration to the *preux chevalier* Gustav Adolf, "the incarnation of rectitude, generosity and loftiness of purpose," who, according to the accepted narrative, risked everything he had and was in furtherance of a noble cause. Subsequent research, however, shows him to have been a mere interventionist, who waged war in distracted Germany, as did President Polk in turbulent Mexico, for sordid interests, which he deftly cloaked with the robes of an apostle of Protestantism. But we look in vain through German and Swedish school-books\* for an avowal or hint of this damaging discovery. It is deliberately ignored. For national pantheons resemble the Kingdoms of Heaven and Hell in that they keep their inmates cloistered for all eternity.

The Spanish and Gallic wars of Julius Cæsar were also forms of intervention undertaken, the former for the purpose of supplying that great man with the wherewithal to pay off his debts, and the latter in order to enable him to get possession of Rome. It is but just to add parenthetically that neither campaign was stained with the atrocities which characterized the recent invasions of Haiti and Santo Domingo by the marines of the United States.

Again, if we take those paragons of civic virtue, Cato and Brutus, into the Rhadamanthine court of uncompromising truth, what do we find? That the former was an extortioner of the hypocritical type, who, having been delegated as special commissioner to Cyprus, in order to settle a dispute respecting a royal legacy,† contrived to bring back the goodly sum of seven thousand talents, equivalent to three millions sterling of our money. And the latter, who is said to have been moved

\* The Germans have recently begun to expurgate their school-books.

† An appanage of one of the Ptolemys.

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by the noblest impulse of civic virtue to slay Cæsar, was in truth a callous usurer, who richly deserves the first place among the Shylocks of all time. Brutus arranged municipal loans for the Salaminians of Cyprus, and by way of collecting his dues dispatched a representative\* with a force of cavalry, which beset the town of Salamis, hemmed in the inhabitants, and kept them without food until several senators there died of hunger. At last the inhabitants in despair undertook to return the sum borrowed. But Brutus wanted more. He demanded interest over and above. And when the unfortunate citizens inquired at what rate he reckoned it, they received the answer: "At forty-eight per cent. per annum," which was exactly four times more than the legal rate. On another occasion he extorted the equivalent of nearly half a million sterling from a petty prince.†

Are these the traits of noble and incorruptible patriots whom the school youth of the cultured world should learn to revere?

And the annals of the modern world are written in a far more mischievous spirit than those of the old. For they sow the poison seeds of national conceit, hatred and rancour, which are the proximate causes of quarrels and hostilities.

Those were the sentiments that led to the world-war. One has but to peruse the school-books, the histories, the university lectures, the articles of newspapers and reviews, the speeches of law-givers, the tendencies of novels and cinematographs—in a word, of every medium of instruction and education—to perceive that a war of sentiments was preparing the peoples for a war of heavy guns and poison gases. And it is futile to lay the blame on this side or on that. On this count both are equally guilty.

Glance at the Germans of the Empire. They preached an idolatrous worship of their country which took precedence of law, morality and God: "*Deutschland über Alles.*" When reading the panegyric of his own people uttered by Baron Stengel, we fancy we are listening to Mr. Harding descanting on the superior goodness of the United States:

"We Germans," he wrote, "have been chosen by Providence to stand at the head of all cultured peoples. . . . We

\* Named Scaptius.

† Ariobarzanes.

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form the crown of culture of all creation. . . . Subjection to our superior guidance therefore is the surest and sole means by which every nation may attain to a prosperous existence.”\*

Fichte, who as a philosopher ought to have maintained a more sage reserve, wrote :

“ Among all modern nations Ye (Germans) are the one in whom the embryo of human perfection is most certainly to be found.”† And in another place he said :

“ To possess character and to be German are identical.”

And Sombart, the philosopher and scholar, in whose soul, one would have thought, there could be no room for national animosity, entitled his work on England and *Germany* : “ *Hucksters and Heroes.*”‡

In France an equally virulent poison flowed in the veins of the educators and instructors of the young generations, and brought on the subsequent mania, with the symptoms of which the world is sufficiently acquainted to-day. School-books and stories for the young constituted a mental preparation and stimulus for a war of revenge. From these sources a powerful stream of animosity and hate was steadily poured out over the people, and as the influence of the school was unchecked the minds of the young were soaked with those odious sentiments. Some of these writings have had three hundred and fifty-six editions and six hundred and sixty thousand copies. A standard work of this character was Paul Déroulède’s Christmas book entitled : “ *Monsieur le Hulan et les trois Couleurs.*”§

In other countries the same engrafted, misunderstood patriotism has brought forth similar fruits.

But one of the most powerful agencies of popular education in modern times is the Press. This democratic institution very often has it in its power to knit nations and peoples together or to set them by the ears. Since the world-war the largest section of it has declined to wield that influence for the purpose of bringing the peoples nearer to each other. It has exerted itself

\* Cf. F. C. Endres : “ *Vaterland und Menschheit,*” pp. 48–49.

† “ *Reden an die deutsche Nation.*”

‡ “ *Händler und Helden.*”

§ Another is “ *Les Volontaires* ” by Erckmann-Chatrian. An instructive article on this subject appeared in the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, March, 1922. I ought to repeat here that all the examples given in this chapter are mine. President Obregón has never once, to my knowledge, uttered one word to which the most sensitive foreigner could take umbrage. In this matter of reserve I have never met his like.

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to keep them apart. In the United States many influential Press organs are always to be found on the side of the millionaires and rising politicians who too often keep the keys of publicity in their possession.

The frequency and facility with which distrust, suspicion and rancour are fomented unwittingly and deliberately by influential newspapers are too well known to need concrete proofs. But, by way of illustration, one glaring case of recent occurrence deserves mention. It turns upon the influence of the French Press, which was daily announcing the secret machinations, the accumulation of arms and munitions and the preparations for a fresh war which it alleged were taking place in Germany. The official watchmen of the Allies, hypnotized by these continuous affirmations, were prepared to find proofs of them at all times and in all places. And when they were approached one day by a German who assured them that he, as Assessor, was frequently entrusted with important State papers which bore out these charges, they believed him. These letters, together with others that he could obtain, he said, by bribery, he was willing to sell. As soon as he had given specimens of the kind of documents to which he claimed to have access, his proposal was accepted, money was paid down and the number of confidential letters, secret reports, etc., which he delivered was imposing. From first to last they were forgeries, written on stolen official formularies and consisting of wild concoctions of his own brain without even such a remote relation to reality as verisimilitude confers. One of them filled twenty closely-written pages and was specially fabricated for the Poles concerning an alleged transport of German troops, officers and munitions to Königsberg. So circumstantial was this report that it gave the exact number of knapsacks, boots, cartridges, guns and supplementary helmets of a body of troops which had no existence outside the imagination of this criminal mischief-maker.

For Erich Anspach was a known forger whose mind was unhinged. And yet he contrived to swindle M. Nollet and his colleagues, who were official representatives of the Allied Governments. For no inquiries were instituted as to the man's antecedents. The statements he advanced were just such as the eminent commissioners, their Polish friends and the French Press anticipated, and that was naïvely deemed to be sufficient.

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Of those costly "materials" abundant and sinister use was made. They exasperated the Allies and provoked angry Notes. At the Washington Conference they provided a forcible text for M. Briand's discourse on the German danger. They are said to have influenced MM. Poincaré, Lefèvre and Maginot, and to have occasioned the vehement representations about the obstructionist attitude of Germany towards the Military Commission. In a word, they fulfilled their purpose.

When Erich Anspach was at last arrested\* he told his story frankly, and gloated over the Boeotian naïveté of the celebrated diplomatists. But the mischief was already done.

That is but a mild illustration of the power of newspapers for evil. What the Press is capable of achieving for the good of mankind has not yet been demonstrated.

But the roots of the evil? They lie in the prevalent ideas on the subject of education. They are interwoven with the threads of modern civilization, which, having lost most other restraints, is hedged round with ignorance and fear. Nowhere to-day does the newspaper Press as a whole fulfil its primary functions. In lieu of leading it is led. It fears to present its readers with unpalatable facts or to swim against the stream.

When it was objected to General Obregón that education as a specific for the evils which are dislocating the political and social systems of the world requires much time, patience, faith and organization before it can produce results, he answered: "Short cuts generally take one further from the goal than the longer ways. Laws and edicts are easily promulgated, but they fail to reach the evil which is embedded in the psyche of individuals and peoples. Humanity and cruelty are both products of our civilization, but statutes cannot create the former nor destroy the latter. Education alone can modify man's outlook on life and his attitude towards his fellows. A change of forms is but a wrinkle on the face of the water. It leaves the depths intact. Education is undoubtedly a slowly operating medicine, but its effect is radical. Moreover, every serious beginning is the end of a previous process. And that is a great gain. What strikes us all most forcibly are the offensive nationalist extravagances, but below the surface symptoms may also be detected of a semi-conscious approach of all to all. No time should be lost in utilizing this opportunity. For it is

\* In May, 1922.

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not enough to run fast. One must also set out in time. This is a consideration which the peoples of the world should take to heart."

One of President Obregón's favourite ideas is to see a Conference convened, to which representatives of the Press of all countries should be delegated, for the purpose of eliminating in the first instance those objectionable features of that institution which tend to alienate nations one from the other. A similar world-parliament of schoolmasters and professors might also discuss their international functions—for they have such—with incalculable advantage to the human race. And so on with the other educators of peoples. Until the world awakes to the necessity of some such exchange of ideas with a view to co-operation for the benefit of the larger community of which all nations and races are members, one may possibly devise palliatives of the evil, but there will be no cure.

Mexico has accepted the idea of her President and is now embodying it. The energetic Minister of Public Instruction has enlisted the collaboration of thousands of voluntary workers. In none of the primary schools or other educational establishments of the Republic are sentiments of dislike or disdain for foreign peoples to be instilled or tolerated, and in all devotion to the service of man is being inculcated. Patriotism is also encouraged, but only in its highest forms, which include esteem and friendship for all races and nations. The school-books in the Republic, especially those dealing with national history, are at the same time being closely scrutinized with a view to purging them of every vestige of Chauvinism and of every allusion capable of offending foreign susceptibilities.

In brief, Mexico is leading the way.

It may be worth adding that another of President Obregón's desires is to see all those peace-loving associations amalgamated and compactly organized which exist at present in various countries of the globe for the purpose of preparing the ground for the new seed, but whose efforts, being unco-ordinated, are still feeble.

Alvaro Obregón is essentially a sower of that potent seed, and this is one of his principal titles to the recognition of the peoples of the world. Hitherto, wherever he has worked a fresh vitalizing force has entered into human relations. For he is one of those leaders whose words beget deeds. And he now has

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a large circle of disciples whose desire, like his own, is to build up a new world-organism on the basis of morality and for the pursuit of the highest aims of humanity.

In conclusion it is worth remembering that this world-reformer and iconoclast, who has no reverence for the fossil institutions of bygone ages, conducts an enterprise of unprecedented difficulty and delicacy without dealing rancour or scorn to unscrupulous antagonists whose steadfast aim is to foil his endeavours. In his most ardent reaction against the pestilent outgrowths of pettifogging politics and capitalistic intrigue he is ever careful to keep well within the bounds of urbanity when dealing with their exponents. In vain one looks for a trace of vindictiveness in his action or of bitterness in his language. And he is not merely just, but generous. "We all need indulgence," is one of his favourite sayings, to which one might aptly add that it is practised most by those who need it least. His intercourse with weaker States has invariably been characterized by magnanimity, for he rightly holds that always to exercise one's strength is a sure sign of weakness.

FINIS







